

heir home is at the rounded end of a cul-de-sac, a fact somewhat symbolic of the way Leach Construction of Vermont does business.

The "cul-de-sac" is a concept most identified with rampant suburban housing development of the 1960s. That definition is a far cry from the innovative, highly personalized, and technologically sophisticated homes Leach Construction is known for, and for which it has garnered more than a dozen awards for energy efficiency, environmental excellence, and design innovation.

Judy and Andy Leach — who live at that Jericho cul-de-sac — and Andy's brother Todd, the company's vice president, point out that their philosophy is about building homes that serve their customers well in terms of comfort, durability, and long-term savings through efficiency. It is not about foisting modern designs on people who don't want them.

Although a Leach home might blend into one of those now-traditional culde-sacs if that's what its owner wanted, its performance — which incorporates factors like minimized air infiltration, mechanical ventilation, efficient heating and cooling systems, natural and energy-efficient lighting — would set it apart.

Andy and Judy Leach - the com-



Judy Leach, Andy's wife and a company owner, is general manager.

pany's president and business manager, respectively — built their own home in 2001. It marked their return to Vermont from Massachusetts (both had graduated from the University of Vermont in 1988.) and the founding of the company as a Vermont entity.

Andy and Judy had moved to Chelmsford, Mass., following graduation. Both small-town people (she, from New Gloucester, Maine), they were looking for a change, says Judy.

He went to work for a custom home builder in New Hampshire. She pursued a master's degree in environmental science at Boston University while working as an environmental engineer for a large Boston company.

"It's specialized work, in terms of evaluating risks to human health and the environment," she says. "What I took away from that and brought to Leach Construction was basically the project-management side of doing business. Also, the desire to create healthy environments within the housing industry, which helped steer us toward green building."

In 1992, Andy started Leach Construction in Chelmsford.

Meanwhile, Todd, who had graduated from UVM in 1993, was in Colorado working in hospitality. In 1999, when Andy landed a good-sized project, Todd decided to return east and help his brother with the job.

"I basically learned from the ground up, because I didn't have experience in the construction industry until that," he says.

But their small-town, rural back-grounds eventually prevailed, and the three turned their attention, and their ambitions, back to Vermont. Andy and Judy purchased the lot on Bradley Bow Road (which, to be fair, is not your prototypical cul-de-sac, but a small, rural road near the Winooski River).

"We shut down the business, Judy quit her job, we bought the lot, and that's when the four of us, including our brother Scott, came together," says Andy. (Todd, Judy, and Andy are the owners and officers of Leach Construction. Scott—at 43—is three years older than Todd and two years younger than Andy. Todd and his wife, Jen, have two daughters, Grace, 7, and Kate, 5.)

They wanted to take the company in a new direction. Building Andy and Judy's house on Bradley Bow Road — which would also become the company's headquarters — provided them an opportunity to try out their ideas before taking them to market.

"In Massachusetts almost every-

thing we did was a renovation of sorts," says Andy. "That's a function of limited available land and lots. So we had more than 10 years of experience in renovation that led up to where we wanted to take our ideas for new construction. It's a completely different challenge from renovation."

"Andy and Judy had spent years researching the new technology that was out there," adds Todd. "Vermont is a very traditional region when it comes to construction techniques.

"Andy was specifically interested in utilizing some of the new technology, but before we sold our Vermont customers on it, we wanted to see these concepts and materials in practice and see how they performed. We incorporated a lot of that into Andy's house. Shortly after, I built my house [also in Jericho] using a lot of these materials and systems."

Leach Construction is a purposefully small company, with construction crews that typically extend to only one or two skilled carpenters beyond the basic trio of Andy, Todd, and their brother Scott Leach. Their goal is to provide intensely client-focused services.

"With each client we're trying to build a relationship that will enable us to carry out their wishes as much as possible," says Andy. "It may be a simple structure or it may be more complex. It's all about how the customer is going to interact with their home, and making sure we can take their vision and make it complete."

That process, of course, was simplified with Andy and Judy's home: They were to be the customers, and the home would be designed for their needs. It would also be the company's headquarters, so it needed a well-situated office space; the couple had two young children, Nate and Jack (a third child, Megan, was born after they had returned to Vermont), so they needed an open first-floor design that would enable them to monitor the kids' activities from wherever they happened to be. It would need to be a showcase for their own design sensibilities, and prove the merits of the materials and techniques that are at the center of their construction goals.

A decade later, it is all those things.

To deliver their services, more than vision, technological acumen, and construction skills are needed; Leach Construction must function well as a business unit. Judy, Andy, and Todd are in agreement that it does, and credit a teamwork rooted in family ties and tradition. Todd and Andy's parents owned the general store in Cambridge when the boys were growing up (the family lived

## Leach Construction of Vermont

in nearby Westford) and they and their two brothers worked in the store from a very young age.

Andy and Judy met at the University of Vermont, which Todd also attended. "The ironic part," says Judy, "is that at UVM, Andy and Todd were both business majors and I was a biology major; yet I ended up operating the business end of the company. But it works out well; the three of us put our heads together on just about everything."

It was as a college student that Andy became involved in construction, working summers with a large company in Chittenden County that built hotels, condominiums, and office buildings. He caught the construction bug and pursued the work after graduating, working next for a custom home builder - a totally different experience.

"You get to see the project from conception to completion," he says, "which is more rewarding than working on a big crew putting up a shell and then moving on to the next one. You see everything that goes into a house."

Andy expanded on that experience by working for another small employer specializing in custom woodworking - stairs, doors, interior trim, historic renovation. "It was an eve-opener," he says, "that you didn't have to take offthe-shelf products to make a house." Now, as nominal president of a company that

sometimes employs such artisans as subcontractors, Andy says Vermont is fortunate to be a mecca for talented craftsmen.

There is a renovation side to Leach Construction, and all three agree that it's an important facet of their work. Where they have made their mark, however, is in new green construction.

"That's not something we just add onto our houses," Judy emphasizes. "Energy-efficient homes are the cornerstone of our business. It's important for people to know that you can incorporate green design and efficiency into homes along the spectrum of price range, including modest-priced houses."

The company has become a leader in the field, noted for achieving a 5-Star rating from Efficiency Vermont for everything it has built.

Joe Sinagra, executive director of the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont, points out that in 2007 Leach Construction earned the HBRA's Builder of the Year award. (Todd is currently vice president of the HBRA board of directors.)

"What's wonderful about the company is that it's a younger generation of builders," says Sinagra. "They've turned their company into one of the top green construction companies in the state, and they're a leader in the field. It's great to see a company like that thriving in Vermont."

They also help disseminate expertise in green and efficient technologies - Todd, particularly - helping to organize educational seminars and "Breakfast with the Experts" learning opportunities for association members.

Architect and furniture designer Chris Brown (Christian Brown Design) is a former customer and sometime collaborator with Leach Construction, on his own home as well as other projects. He appreciates Todd, Judy, and Andy's vision and capabilities, but praises them as well for another valuable quality.

"They're just really honest, hardworking people, who care a lot about the work they do," says Brown.

As they should. No one needs to be told that energy costs have trended upwards and will continue to do so. Enabling Vermonters to live in comfortable, healthy homes, whose energy usage they can afford, is important work.

