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## Keller Homes builds on a philosophy of customer service

BY PAM HOSKINS *The Gazette Special Sections*

Many companies tout customer service as their No. 1 goal, but when customers are singing the praises of a builder even after they've lived in the house for several months, you're more likely to believe it's true.

Keller Homes consistently scores high in customer surveys conducted by an outside company. Buyers are surveyed at move in, five months later and after 11 months in the home. At move in, 91 percent of homeowners say they would recommend Keller Homes. At 11 months, that number goes up to 95 percent. An increase like that is unusual, says Pam Keller, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Keller Homes. But, she thinks the number goes up because after living in the house for a while, buyers are "happy with the house, and they realize it."

To keep up that customer satisfaction, Keller Homes invites potential buyers to look carefully inside the homes. Keller Homes staff members listen to their clients to find out what to do better, according to Keller. Until you actually live in a home, you don't know what it's like behind the walls — what you can see and



The Keller Homes design studio helps customers make decor decisions for their new homes. Photo by Bill Sommer

touch and feel, Keller says, adding, "We like to know that they are satisfied with their home."

A lot goes into the process of buying and building a new home. Keller Homes tries to "unplug the worry" by putting a system in place that minimizes anxiety by making sure staff members do what they tell their customers they'll do, according to Keller. She says she and her associates have been building homes long enough to get it right but knows there will be problems if the process isn't carefully monitored.

Part of that process involves how the home is delivered to the customer. Rather than the customers walking through their new home and having to look for defects or problems, the building superintendent first delivers the home to a quality manager. Because the quality manager does not work for the building department, he or she assesses the new home more rigorously.

The quality manager systematically evaluates the house and makes a list of anything that needs to be corrected — all before the buyers ever see the home.

Building the same floor plan more than once means Keller Homes staff members are able to learn what works and what doesn't. They know what idiosyncrasies don't work, Keller says, adding, "We can design from scratch based on what we've done before, and we know what our customers want."

For example, Keller Homes continually got feedback from customers that they want good air flow and comfort in every room of their house, says Keller. Although reaching that goal is a challenge because of outside factors like the hot western sun in Colorado Springs, the company has worked hard to accomplish room-to-room air consistency.

"We try to break out from traditional building practices in our

region," says Tom Adams, vice president of operations for Keller Homes.

Keller Homes subcontracts with specialists in each trade of the building industry. And while many subcontractors tend to be industry specific and not look at the whole house, Keller Homes guides contractors in a way of building that produces an end result that is not so fragmented in thinking, according to Adams. Building a better home involves overcoming shortcomings of how all the systems interact, he says. Keller Homes works to facilitate how all the parts work together.

Keller Homes has long-term relationships with many of their subcontractors and feels lucky to have some of the best working with them, according to Adams. For the contractors, "It's a feather in their cap to say they work with Keller Homes," he says.

A challenge for home builders is working with societal concerns such as the environment, says Adams. Keller Homes addresses such concerns by trying to build a good house today — a comfortable home that is a good investment and performs well in its maintenance period, he says. Concerns for the environment will get addressed if you focus on

meeting those goals and use good materials, according to Adams.

For example, Colorado Springs Utilities approached Keller Homes to be a part of the Energy Star program, and Keller Homes agreed. Inspectors found that houses built by Keller Homes were already meeting required criteria. Simply by striving to meet goals and satisfy customers, Keller Homes meets the Energy Star standards without making any changes to its current home building practices, Adams says.

In the quest to find a good process to avoid mistakes and satisfy their customers, Keller Homes set up its first design studio in the early '90s. That studio was one of the very first ones in the area, and the current studio is the fourth incarnation. In the studio, each customer works with one design consultant throughout the process of designing the home. The consultant works with the customer as long as it takes, with no limit on the number of appointments.

Because there are so many options when building a home — from siding to appliances to floor coverings — the design studio at Keller Homes brings the customers' choices into one room.

Even within the confines of the studio the choices can be overwhelming, so the Keller Homes design consultant works with each buyer to determine price point, likes, dislikes, what's important to the customer and what's not. Then the consultant narrows down the samples to show each person, based on that customer's preferences. The design studio helps buyers discover the things that make a house a home, Keller says, "so that it lives the way you want to live."

The people at Keller Homes pride themselves on being perfectionists and want their customers to be as well. They are always asking if their customers are happy with what's offered, what else is out there that might make life easier for their customers, and what they need to offer, according to Keller.

"We're all sticklers (at Keller Homes). It's the nature of the beast with this company," she says.

Web site:  
[www.kellerhomes.com](http://www.kellerhomes.com)