

Droste Longevity

Building St. Charles — 75 Years Strong

Story by Robin Seaton Jefferson
Photo by Michael Schlueter

With the building boom that has consumed St. Charles County over the last two decades, its easy to forget who in affect started it all.

Al Droste and Sons Construction is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. Touted as the most stable and reliable—most certainly the oldest—construction firm in St. Charles County, Droste is still going strong.

“Our company brings piece of mind to its customers with a reputation for trying their hardest to do a good job for their clients, and with proven longevity,” said Jim Droste.

Personal service and availability from owners Jim and Steve Droste during all phases of the job is what has continued the

company's tradition since their grandfather started Droste in 1933.

“He was pretty well known for being a good custom home builder,” Jim said of his grandfather. “Most of the stories I ever heard about him was from carpenters who were apprentices under him, how good he was and how hard he made them work. He was a pretty particular old German. He made sure everything was right.”

After working as a journeyman carpenter for many years, Alvin Droste started the company, establishing himself as a quality contractor and craftsman. Al Droste and Sons Construction continued through WWII working on maintenance construction, with the help of Alvin's oldest son Robert Droste. After serving in the war, Alvin's youngest son, Raymond Droste returned and joined the company. After that, the Alvin and his sons concentrated

their business mostly on new custom homes.

Jim said Alvin did build the Willie Harris school though and a few Lutheran schools in St. Charles county. He also built the First National Bank building on the corner of Third and First Capitol Dr. just up the street from Pio's.

Raymond was named president in 1959 when the company incorporated. The custom home building continued but the company began building more commercial buildings throughout the 1970's.

The company built the Indian Hills, Runny Meade and Huntington Park subdivisions in the mid 1960's, Jim said. “And dad did all the Texaco filling stations in town.”

In 1974, Jim and Steve started working as journeymen carpenters for their father Raymond and their Uncle Robert. This was



the official beginning of what would become the third generation of Al Droste and Sons Construction.

Ray, Jim and Steve bought out Robert and became equal partners with Raymond in 1982 while Raymond maintained his role as president. The company was just on the recovery from the recession of the late 1970's and early 1980's. By 1983, things had started back very well in commercial construction and in 1986 new housing took off.

Raymond retired in 1989 and Jim became president. Steve became vice-president.

Some of Droste's most notable projects include the commercial construction of the Baue Funeral Home at Cave Springs which houses St. Charles County first crematorium; Rx Systems, an 80,000-square-foot facility that utilizes a HVAC system that is another of St. Charles County's firsts. A chilled water system is coupled with an air cooled chiller and an ice storage tank that provides the cooling for the building by producing ice at night, while allowing utility rates to be lower.

Historic renovations have also been a part of Droste's construction repertoire over the years. The company fully remodeled the First Capitol Trading Post, raising ceilings, historically reproducing the parade balcony and producing a completely new store front. Other restoration projects include the Canoe Restaurant, Boone's Lick Trail Inn, the Winery of the Little Hills and four buildings for the Quilogy Campus.

Today Droste employees 10 people. Jim's wife works in the office. Jim, who originally wanted to be an architect, said he doesn't know where the company will be in ten years. He has two sons and one daughter. "She's interested in shopping," Jim said. (She's also majoring in apparel management at the University of Missouri at Columbia) His two sons want to become an architectural and mechanical engineer.

"We do have a good chance of having a couple of sons in laws come along. Nothing's out of the question," Jim said. "I don't see myself retiring at 65 anyway."

Jim said each generation of his family has "upscaled the last's buildings. We build buildings much bigger than my father and grandfather ever did."

Jim said he isn't sure how they would survive in today's building environment. "The paperwork most of all slows down the construction and doesn't do o much for the quality of the project. That would drive them nuts." ■

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