

## SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

# Emerald Park Homes Holmes approved

## Local builder meets high standards

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LEADER-POST

WHITE CITY — When first contacted by Mike Holmes's Holmes Approved Homes program last fall, Garry and Lorena Sawchyn, co-owners of Emerald Park Homes, thought the phone call must be a prank or scam.

"We do get a lot of these calls, 'you've just won a Caribbean cruise'," said Lorena, who manages the office for Emerald Park Homes.

But it was no joke. It was a representative with the Holmes Group in Calgary, calling to see if the company was interested in becoming the first Holmes Approved builder in the Regina area.

"It was a little overwhelming because you don't expect somebody like that to call you out of the blue," said Garry. "They asked us if we were interested (in becoming a Holmes Approved builder). We did a little of bit of research to make sure it was exactly what they said it was."

When they learned that the famous Mike Holmes, host of TV's Holmes on Homes, Holmes Inspection and Holmes Makes it Right, wanted to visit with the Sawchyns and inspect one of their custom-built homes with the view of being certified as a Holmes Approved builder, they were thrilled — and a little apprehensive.

They talked to the owner of Campbell Homes in Saskatoon, one of two Saskatoon builders that have been approved by the Holmes



Lorena and Garry Sawchyn, co-owners of Emerald Park Homes — the first builder in the Regina area to earn certification for excellent workmanship from contractor/TV star Mike Holmes.

BRYAN SCHLOSSER/Leader-Post

Group, and were reassured that the Holmes inspection process was very thorough, but fair. "They wanted to see some of our work. They came through the house, looked through everything very thoroughly and were very impressed with what we had done," Garry said. "It's another set of eyes for us, as far as the inspections are concerned, so that people can be reassured that everything was built right."

Lorena said the experience of being inspected by Mike Holmes' team was an "eye-opener" for Emerald Park's sub-contractors, too. "They feel like Mike is looking over their shoulder be-

cause they know an inspector trained by Mike Holmes will be out to inspect their work."

Garry said Holmes has very high standards that he expects the builder to meet, from the foundation to the roof and everything in between. "I like doing it once and I like doing it right," Garry added. "That fits in with the philosophy of Mike Holmes."

But Mike and Garry share more than just a philosophy of building. In his letter of support, Holmes called the owner of Emerald Park Homes "an honest builder with honest values. Garry's been in the business for over

30 years — I've been in the business for 30 years. They own a family business. So do I."

In fact, Garry has been a builder since 1980, starting as a sub-contractor with Apex Construction. In 1992, Garry expanded into homebuilding with Emerald Park Homes, based in the booming bedroom communities of White City and Emerald Park, 10 kilometres east of Regina. "We were looking for a niche," Garry said. "At the time, there really wasn't anybody out this way building. So that's basically where it started from."

Today, Emerald Park Homes has expanded its

customer base well beyond the Emerald Park-White City area to a 100-mile radius, including Regina. And like the Holmes Group, the Sawchyns' two sons are also working with the company, so it's definitely a family affair.

"It's really worked out for us. Word of mouth is our best pitch," Garry added.

Marilyn Braun-Pollon, vice-president of Prairie and agribusiness for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said word of mouth advertising or the endorsement of a widely known and respected business person, like Mike Holmes, is invaluable to any

small business. "It's priceless," she said. "It sets you apart."

But, like they say, you can't buy that kind of advertising and becoming a Holmes Approved builder is not the kind of recognition money can buy.

Seth Atkins, director of Holmes Approved Homes, said Holmes's approach is unique among home inspection programs. "The one failing that we've felt has always been with the other certification programs is that they're checklist based. We want to find people who not only share the same philosophy as us, but also a commitment to better building. That is something you can only do when you go and talk to the people behind the organization."

For example, they want to know whether the home was properly insulated, heated and ventilated, energy efficient and well constructed, using quality materials and sound building techniques that make the home watertight, airtight, fire-resistant, mould-resistant and sound insulated.

"Mike always says, 'We want to build from outside in, not from the inside out.' That's where you want to make the investment in quality in your home. All those things on the inside won't amount to a hill of beans if the outside starts falling on you," Atkins said.

While there are many excellent home builders in the Regina area, only one is approved by Holmes Approved Homes so far. And getting the endorsement of Mike Holmes is not something you can apply for. "If someone hits our radar screen, they must be doing something right," Atkins said.

"They don't find us. We find them."