

Barkman named to Chamber's top award

Joel Barkman, owner of Golden Rule Builders, Inc., in Catlett, was named the Fauquier Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year in November.

"This year's winner has worked tirelessly in the building industry as chapter president of the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association, and has volunteered on many committees, including the Fauquier County Business Advisory Council, and numerous others," said 2009 winner Mary Leigh McDaniel in presenting the award. "He is a respected Elder in his church, and has helped those in need by making contributions and raising funds for the area's homeless shelters and for those in need of affordable housing.

"A leader in the 'green building' movement, this year's winner is a proponent of responsible building practices, sustainable design, and environmental stewardship — all of which help make for a stronger Fauquier County."

Despite the current cache about "green building," only about one in five clients who approach Golden Rule about building a home come in with green at or near the top of their wish lists, Barkman said.

"If we could get more people to ask these questions, it would make my job easier, our homes better, our community healthier. That's the goal."

And it's a ways off. Homeowners don't routinely see the construction details, and, without being educated, wouldn't appreciate them if they did. And when it all comes down to dollars and cents, they too often "get the normal house, with normal leaks and the normal bills," Barkman said.

In interviews, Barkman spends as much time touting the benefits of membership in the Northern Virginia Building

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Industry Association, for which he recently served as Fauquier chapter president, as he does promoting his own firm — though the two are intricately linked.

And he spends a fair amount of time lamenting the fact that more local builders either aren't members, or don't take their membership seriously.

The NVBIA, the Home Builders Association of Virginia, and other, national builders' groups are educational goldmines, Barkman said. "How do we make our company better? Education. Very few companies do that," he said.

Education about new products, for example — many of which are launched with fanfare and advertising blitzes that dazzle consumers.

"So many new products get pulled back, revised," Barkman said. "We steer away from them until they have been sufficiently tried, tested.



Piedmont Business Journal Photo/Bill Walsh

MAN OF THE YEAR: Joel Barkman, owner of Golden Rule Builders, Inc. in Catlett, was named the Person of the Year by the Fauquier County Chamber of Commerce.

"If I don't go to the builders' show, to the association meetings, I would never find out about the problems some new products are having. I would be at the whim of the homeowner, and that's what we are seeing in the industry," he said. "Most builders are just giving homeowners what they think they want because, [the builders] are not educated."

When it comes to housing, consumers have been convinced that size matters. Houses that were mansions 30 years ago are routinely dwarfed by today's run-of-the-mill development homes.

That likely will change, Barkman said, and rightfully so.

"I think we builders need to encourage the trend to

downsize, to make homes more efficient," Barkman said. "If you have money to spend, put it in amenities. That's what we are advising clients: Don't put that big building up, then skimp on materials."

Doing that, he said, is "going to cost you an arm and a leg.

"We have to think differently," Barkman mused. "We have to think of where we're spending our money. We have to think about what's the wise thing to do."

That's a paradigm shift that, at least potentially, has far-reaching ramifications.

Golden Rule Builders, Inc., is located at 3409 Catlett Road, and can be reached at (540) 788-3539. The website is www.goldenrulebuilders.com.