



2015 JESSE H. NEAL
AWARD WINNER



3030 W. Salt Creek Lane, Suite 201
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025
847.391.1000 • Fax: 847.390.0408

STAFF

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Denise Dersin
703.992.7640; ddersin@sgcmail.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Amy Albert
818.308.6648; aalbert@sgcmail.com

SENIOR EDITOR

Mike Beirne
847.391.1051; mbeirne@sgcmail.com

CONTENT MANAGER

Ingrid Bush
202.780.9591; ibush@sgcmail.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Michael Chamernik
847.954.7976; mchamernik@sgcmail.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Susan Bady | Bob Schultz | Scott Sedam

DESIGNER

Robin Hicks

GROUP DIRECTOR – PRINCIPAL

Tony Mancini
484.412.8686; tmancini@sgcmail.com

DIRECTOR OF EVENTS

Judy Brociek
847.954.7943; jbrociek@sgcmail.com

DIRECTOR OF AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Doug Riemer

MANAGER OF CREATIVE SERVICES

Lois Hince

MARKETING DIRECTOR

Michael Porcaro
847.954.7925; mporcaro@sgcmail.com

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

Circulation Department, Professional Builder
3030 W. Salt Creek Lane, Suite 201
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025
circulation@sgcmail.com

REPRINTS

Adrienne Miller
847.391.1036; amiller@sgcmail.com

CORPORATE

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Owning It

This month's cover story by senior editor Mike Beirne takes an in-depth look at what set the winners of this year's National Housing Quality Awards apart from the competition. Top honors went to Veridian Homes, based in Madison, Wis., a home builder that encourages employees to think like owners. It's a mindset promoted throughout the company. Beirne describes how Veridian's open-book management makes employees aware of the impact their actions have on income statements and balance sheets. An employee group meets weekly to deal with customer concerns and address speed bumps before they affect customer satisfaction. At Veridian, the title of job superintendent or construction manager is "personal builder," a title that's more than just words. Veridian's personal builders are in charge of the homes they've overseen for one year after closing. Instead of a handoff to a customer-care pro, the trust gained over the home building process is leveraged.

In addition to the NHQ award winners, we profile Tom Gillespie, inductee into the NHQ Hall of Fame. Gillespie knows a thing or two about the rigors of vying for NHQ consideration. He describes applying in 1995 for the first time, having been named president of Kennedy Community Development (KCD) two years earlier. Gillespie breezed through the application in a couple of hours. "The examiners saw through us like a piece of Swiss cheese," he says. Gillespie and KCD reapplied in 1996 and, in a first-ever unanimous vote amongst the examiners, won Gold.

Gillespie has been an NHQ examiner since 1998. A firm believer in a robust bottom line being a by-product of excellence, he has led by example and mentored many. Yet the accomplishment of which he's most proud is his service as a United States Marine.

Pegging Gillespie as a hard-charging serviceman-turned-exec, however, would be a mistake. "To make a difference in the lives I touch" is his personal credo and the first item on his résumé. Decades ago at KCD, he noticed an employee crying in her cubicle and learned from her supervisor that a \$300 car repair was costing money she didn't have. "I will give you \$300 right now," Gillespie said to the supervisor, "provided she never learns it was from me and thinks it came from you."

Decades ago, Gillespie's leadership style fostered a special kind of personal investment. This year, Veridian's NHQ gold award is proof that encouraging an ownership ethos hasn't gone out of style. In fact, it's still a winning strategy.

Amy Albert, Editor-in-Chief

aalbert@sgcmail.com

@amyalbertLA

@ProBuilderMag



Fostering a culture of ownership helped Veridian nab top honors.