

Grandma inspires builder to keep elderly in mind

Cole launches Restore Independence to offer home maintenance, modifications

By Nancy Mueller
FOR WILLIAMSON A.M.

It was her grandmother's determination to live out her days in her own home that inspired local homebuilder Lisa Cole to start a new business helping others to do the same thing.

The business is called Restore Independence and it is actually a new division within Cole's existing homebuilding company, Living Homes.

Cole, 38, has been building and remodeling homes in Middle Tennessee for the past 6½ years, mainly in Williamson County.

Over time, she discovered that there is a growing need among older homeowners for a variety of services related to the home.

Access to the right kind of help can often make the difference between staying put and having to move.



Lisa Cole helps seniors stay in their homes.

Sometimes people need construction projects to retrofit bathtubs or widen doorways to accommodate wheelchairs. Sometimes the work stations in a kitchen need to be altered or a safety ramp needs to be installed over the front porch steps, Cole said.

Other homeowners might need only some features added to their homes. Cole's grandmother, who is 95, benefited through a hearing-assisted telephone that Cole installed for her, along with a medical alert system.

Mainly elderly homeowners need help with home maintenance, as well.

"We are hoping to develop a complete package, including services that people need, like cleaning the gutters," Cole said. "We will be a one-stop place where you can go to get those things done."

Grab Bars are common need

One of the most common needs is altering a bathtub or shower, especially the addition of grab bars therein.

That was the first job that Cole priced out for a client, who had been told by another contractor that it would coast \$15,000 to replace his old tub with a walk-in model.

Giving up on the walk-in tub because it was too expensive, the client allowed Cole to price out just the cost of the grab bars.

“When I started researching grab bars, the problem was, how do you know where exactly to place them? Every book or manual I checked, they were in a different position,” Cole said.

The more she researched the issue, the more Cole convinced herself that she could replace the client’s bathtub with a walk-in model and give them the grab bars at a price they could afford. At the same time, she enjoyed the sense of helping someone by combing through the conflicting morass of information that she ran into while preparing the job, and making sense out of it.

It turned out that she was able to do the whole job for about half of the quote from the other builder.



Find this custom shower in a new home at 5000 Destin Lane built by Lisa Cole’s Living Homes.

She enjoys solving problems

That was when she realized that she had found a whole new direction for herself, one that permits her to exercise her problem solving skills and be innovative in ways that home building doesn’t require.

When she is building a house, she said, “I think about the things that people argue about.”

For a custom home she built for one couple, she offered to install a sink in the garage that the husband, a car mechanic, would use before entering the house.

For her own home, she was continually annoyed with her husband’s habit of leaving his clothes on the floor by the bed, so she designed the bedroom so that the bedroom door would be on the left side of the bed. This made the mess on her husband’s side of the room less visible, her husband being particular about sleeping on the right side of the bed.

As Cole launches her new division, she also has two homes for sale in the College Grove area.

They are both on Destin Lane. The one at 5000 Destin Lane is 3,932 square feet, all brick and has four bedrooms and 3½ bathrooms. The house comes with five acres of land and is listed for \$572,700.

The other house, at 5009 Destin Lane, is a brick farmhouse-style with a broad, rocking chair front porch. Inside, there’s a large great room with a stacked-stone fireplace and a big, combined kitchen-dining room.

Cole built this spec house without a “formal” dining room or a “formal” living room, something most builders won’t do in Williamson County.

“It has been one of my most popular plans.” Cole said, adding that she has built this floor plan twice before and never had a problem finding a buyer for it.

That house also comes with five acres. With five bedrooms and 3½ baths as well as a basement, the asking price is \$549,900.

Cole said the prices on both homes are now below what it cost her to build them.

Both homes have Cole's signature touches, which include granite countertops, potfillers over the stoves in the kitchens, lots of hardwood floors, 4-foot wide staircases and two separate closets in the master suite.

Cole is offering free assessments to people interested in renovating a house to accommodate an aging homeowner. For more infor, see www.restoreindependence.com