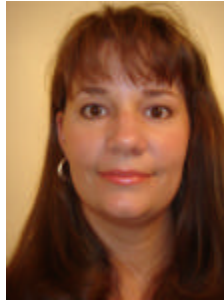


## **Contractor brings feminine touch to building community**

Lisa Cole of College Grove is president of Living Homes Inc. As a general contractor, Cole has remodeled, built and contracted homes all over Williamson County. And as a woman in this business, she says she sees quite a few differences in the way women and men approach their job in such a field.



*Thoughts by those affected by growth. LISACOLE*

***Q: How did you get into the building business?***

A: My ex-father-in-law was a building inspector, and I had done a lot of remodel work when I was growing up. We remodeled our own houses. I tagged along and learned it as we did stuff. I had a degree in computers and was a project manager, so it was the same thing (as general contracting) – I scheduled, planned, I just did it for computer work. I love planning. I could spend all day planning, and I like the flexibility of being outside and just working with the guys. I did some building when I first started but now I pretty much just manage and give advice on how it should be done. Most of the time I don't have to get in there – I just have to make the call.

***Q: What's the biggest challenge you face as a general contractor?***

A: The biggest challenges are the weather and unexpected things that come up because you don't have any control over that, so you build buffer days in.

***Q: Is it difficult being a woman in this field?***

A: I thought it would be when I started. I thought, "I'm getting into a man's world – this is going to be hard," but it's like they see me as their sister. And I always ask a lot of questions, so they get a lot of free reign to do what they want.

***Q: Why do you enjoy this?***

A: My favorite part of building is from the ground up through all the mechanicals. I like picking all the inside stuff and decorations, but my favorite is framing and getting electrical – it's the biggest change. Once you're standing there and all you've got is a foundation and the next week you've got a house.

***Q: How unusual is it for women to be in this field?***

A: I wouldn't say it's rare, but I haven't really seen it growing that much. It's hard work, it's tiring, and I just think that it constantly wears hard on women. We're not as strong as men are. It's hard on people to lug stuff around all the time. I think a lot of women just don't like to get dirty. I think they like the concept and the creativity of it, but getting in there is hard. I think women could do it more than they do. I find a lot of women talk about coming under me but not wanting to take the risk of building. But (there are) more women builders than you would realize. It's not like I would consider myself a lone ranger. I always encourage women to do what they want and go after it. Women are good at multi-tasking and good at communication. Not to say men aren't, but that's just an added benefit in any business.

***Q: How might women approach the job differently from men?***

A: We pay attention to different things – the quality is very important to me. I pay particular attention to the quality and I think people notice that. But the other thing is little things we plan for that men don't think about, like the

colors you could put in a room, or even painting the walls. I stay really neutral with my colors and a lot of men put in a lot of colors. The combinations when you do tiles and trim work; we do wider staircases, and a lot of trim and a lot of granite. The cabinets – I really spend a lot of money on my cabinets, they're like furniture, they're always going to be there. I spend a lot of money on the things you don't change out. I don't put security systems in my house. If you want one, it's so easy to add afterward. But a lot of people put a security system in and go lower down on the cabinets. I also use every nook you can for closets and storage.

**Q: How would you assess the growth happening in Williamson County now?**

A: It's been great. I think we've had a lot of growth, especially in southern Williamson County. Right now it's starting to slow down and I think it'll stay slow through next year, especially with the election. Hearsay from Realtors is that with election years, once the campaign starts nobody really does anything because they're waiting to see if the economy is going to stay bad. So every time there's an election, the market slows down a little bit. I think all of Williamson County is really growing....It still has great schools; it's still a great place to live

**Q: What do you think will be big development-wise in the future?**

A: I think the planned communities are big and I think they'll stay big...like Westhaven and Tollgate. To me, I don't think that way, but I think it's a huge thing and people really like that community and club feel. I see that as a pattern and I think that pattern will continue. I think a lot of people are also wanting to get into bigger land parcels and not have all the restrictions – people are tired of the notebook of restrictions on what they're not allowed to do with their house....Country living is becoming more appealing to people who want more space. It's the two extremes – the people who are really into the planned communities and the people who are not so into the planned communities. I think it's two extremes but the same kind of mentality – the same community feeling.

- INTERVIEW BY RACHEL STULTS, STAFF WRITER