

Building firm boss' first-class treatment of customers, employees really pays off

By Ken Kish
Managing Editor

You have to hand it to Dick Pierson - the guy knows how to throw a party.

Last week Pierson and his lovely wife, Lois, went to the Gem Theatre in Detroit to see the very entertaining and funny musical "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change."

Nothing unusual about that.

What was unusual is that Pierson, a Macomb County businessman, took along 448 customers, business associates and friends.

He purchased every seat in the house for the evening performance.

And then, just to make sure everyone had a good time, he bought drinks.

Pierson was table hopping among his cabaret-style seated guests passing out orange tickets for free drinks. Pierson, all 6 feet 5 inches and 200 pounds-plus with bright red hair, went from table to table like a kid in candy shop.

He seemed to know every invited guest and their guests, all by first name.

Except for a few company Christmas

parties and some rather large weddings, this was probably the biggest party of the year in southeastern Michigan.

But it was modest by Dick Pierson's standards.

Billed as a "customer appreciation party," Pierson-Gibbs Homes Inc. has been hosting these deals for the past 14 years.

The parties, of course, started modestly when the unusual "hands on" home building and financing company was first started in 1984. Like the business Pierson runs, the annual parties have grown over the years. Last year, for instance, Pierson invited 1,000 persons to a Detroit Tigers baseball game.

In prior years, Pierson has treated customers and investors to hay rides, dinners and private parties.

To Pierson, who built a single a single house his first year but has built and financed 118 already this year, it's all part of doing business.

Treat your customers and employees right and it will pay in the long run, Pierson says.

"I may may build houses, but my No. 1 commodity is our employees," he said. "Take care of your workers and it pays."

That's more than just a motto to Dick Pierson.

In addition to his building and finance firm, Pierson owns the Richmond-based

Quality Lumber and Building, which allows him to sell supplies to his customers' contractors at lower prices. He also has private real estate investments.

He employs 34 full-time workers and has another 60 contractors.

Pierson-Gibbs (Gibbs is no longer associated with the company) now builds and finances homes in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. It has served as contractor for homes in the modest \$100,000 range all the way up to a 7,000 square-foot luxury home costing \$1.2 million.

Pierson's wife, Lois, is his partner, and his his four sons all work in the business.

He now lives in a home on Lake St. Clair in New Baltimore - built, of course, by Pierson-Gibbs. He has a restored 1953 Pontiac convertible in the garage and a boat dockside behind his home.

He has cut his work week down from 60 hours to "a little more than 40".

And what does Pierson remember most about his starting a business from scratch and turning it into a \$17 million-a -year success story?

"Well, a few years ago on the 10th anniversary of the company, our employees took up a collection and sent me and Lois on a cruise to Alaska. What a surprise."