

The **Thursday** JULY 8, 2004
www.macombdaily.com
Macomb Daily
MONEY & BUSINESS



Macomb Daily photo by Craig Gaffield
Bill, Tim, Lois, Dick and Eric Pierson celebrate the grand opening of Pierson-Gibbs Homes, Inc., new \$1.2 million addition, The company is marking its 20th anniversary.

Staring out his corner office windows of his company's new \$1.2 million addition, Bill Pierson remembers when the business was run from the garage of his family's home.

Twenty years have past since his father, Dick Pierson, formed Pierson-Gibbs Homes, specializing in custom-built homes. In those two decades, the company has moved from the family's Harrison Township garage to their current headquarters on the border of Richmond and Columbus townships.

Coupled with the family's other venture, Quality Lumber in Richmond, the businesses have annual revenues of more than \$35 million.

Being fair and modest lead to building success

While time has transformed the family business into a profitable enterprise, Bill Pierson, now the president of Pierson-Gibbs after his father's retirement last year, still runs the company with a personal flavor.

Dressed in a loose button-down short-sleeve shirt, khaki shorts and loafers, Pierson shared how most customers are generated by word-of-mouth and how relationships are what strengthen his company.

"The keys to success are modest growth," he said. In a way, Pierson has grown up with the family company. Barely a high school graduate, Pierson joined his father's team at age 18.

"When (my dad) started out, he didn't have much business experience," Bill Pierson said. "He learned as he went along. He taught me how to be fair with people. Building a home is a very stressful thing for a family to do. It's a lifestyle uproar for six to eight months."

The importance of family -- especially in work-related situations -- is not lost on Bill Pierson. An average business day seems like a family reunion within the building. Pierson's younger brothers Eric and Tim work with him, along with his niece, Elaine Closs, and father-in-law, Mike Locke. His mother Lois retired with his father Dick last June, but Dick still comes to the office on a regular basis.

"We've always been a close family, and that's a positive," Bill Pierson said.

That family-atmosphere carries over to Pierson's dealings with his clients. Pierson said building a dream home proves to be one of the main events of a person's life. Pierson-Gibbs' attention to detail and customization have provided them with a star-studded clientele, including singer Uncle Kracker and Kid Rock's guitarist, Jason Krause.

The company headquarters' newly expanded showroom displays the latest in cabinetry, whirlpool tubs, mahogany doors and more. Pierson-Gibbs uses products that are a notch-above when building their homes, such as engineered studs, blown-in cellulose insulation and squeak-free I-floor joists.

Pierson also eliminates the middle-man by owning Quality Lumber, allowing him to buy lumber direct. "We can make better products and keep prices down," he said. "The neat thing is that the two companies share the same overhead."

Customers can come to Pierson-Gibbs with any design in mind, Pierson said. His company then builds the house shell and offers supplies to complete the home, all while allowing the buyer to remain in control.

"We sell the complete package," Pierson said. "None of the competitors do exactly what we do."

In his own Armada home, the second one he's built, Pierson used details such as Brazilian cherry wood floors, a marble foyer, whirlpool tubs in all the bathrooms, a cedar deck and a two-story great room.

While the average home costs \$80 to \$100 per square foot to finish, Pierson said he's built homes on all ends of the spectrum in a variety of locations, ranging from the Upper Peninsula to southern Illinois and from Washington state to Virginia.

"The next step in the company is setting up a hub in Chicago in the next three to five years," he said. The company recently opened a second showroom in the greater Grand Rapids area.

A June 26 grand opening celebration was attended by 800 people, including U.S. Rep. Candice Miller and radio handyman Glenn Haeg. But to Pierson, the most significant visitors who stopped by were the former customers -- some from 15 years ago.

