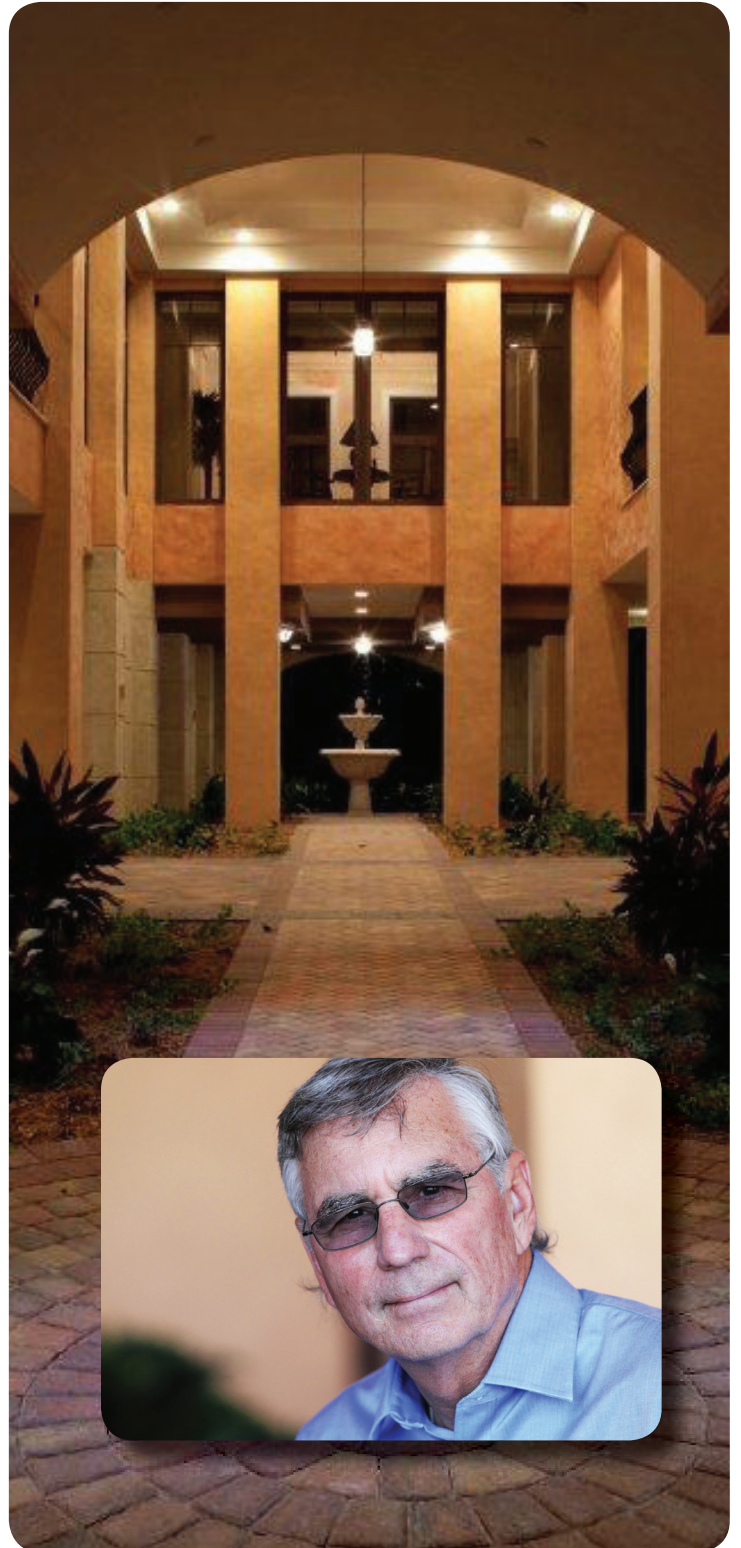


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# Building His Business on Success

by Gretchen Cain Wells

Almost anyone who has lived in the Tampa Bay area since 1971 has seen evidence of Dan Karcher's work. The impressive, newly-remodeled St. Jerome's Catholic Church in Largo, which will be dedicated by Bishop Robert Lynch on Dec. 17, is a product of Dan Karcher Construction Inc., as are dozens of waterfront, high-end homes, six-story condos, and commercial buildings, such as Tech Data headquarters and Castle Supply Companies.

With glossy photo spreads of his homes featured in House Trends and Tampa Bay Metro trade magazines to his credit, Karcher's reputation for exceptional and custom-designed "showpieces" precedes him; yet, Dan Karcher is a very grounded, humble individual. He has no illusions of grandeur and firmly believes there are no shortcuts to success.

Karcher doesn't expect admiration for implementing various styles and techniques that demonstrate fine craftsmanship, or for seeing to literally hundreds of details involved in a project; however, it is gratifying to hear compliments about his work. Unless customers are in the construction business themselves, they generally are more than happy to let Karcher "have at it," and later enjoy the finished product.

Joanne Leahey, a long-time parishioner of St. Jerome's, recently said she expected, "Dan's ears were burning," because good things were being said about him. "We are so excited about the reconfiguration of the church's interior. It is truly beautiful, and we can't wait until it's finished," she said. More about the church and other projects can be seen at [www.dankarcherconstruction.com](http://www.dankarcherconstruction.com).

Karcher was born in Detroit, but is practically a Florida native. He grew up in the area and graduated from Bishop Barry High School, now called St. Petersburg Catholic. After a year of college, Karcher went to work with family members, quickly learning to perform exacting work and endure long hours. "It was a true 'baptism by fire,'" he said.

"I was fortunate to have the benefit of on-the-job training from my uncles, because there is no substitute for firsthand experience," said Karcher. Bob, Joe, Jim and Dennis, who comprised Karcher Bros. Masonry, laid the foundation for their apprentice nephew's "experience," teaching him the tools of the masonry and stucco trade. He learned not to complain and instead, to savor the wonderful feeling of satisfaction that comes with a project's completion.

Karcher describes himself as an upbeat person. "I really don't have time to be negative. Getting ahead is about staying positive. Business is starting to improve. We are seeing more activity this year than last," he said. A challenge to the construction industry remains in licensing and permitting. "Regulation seems to be increasing. At times, it is important because rules and inspections weed out con artists and others who are not capable of doing the job, but there are costly delays," he said.

As someone who is "capable of the job," Karcher has had the experience of being approached by clients who were disappointed with other contractors. "The client had their hopes dashed after being led to believe their project could be built for a certain budget, only to find out after the bid process, they were well over budget."

To combat this lack of communication, Karcher said his company developed close relationships with its subcontractors and architects and prefers to use the design/build approach. Before the process can begin, the client enters into a design/build construction management contract. This contract outlines the costs involved with developing the preliminary plans, producing the budget and establishing the fees to be paid to the contractor for constructing and managing the project.

"It's not just cost that can cause a concern. If not handled correctly, there can be difficulties in the areas of manpower and materials," Karcher said. "Companies staff fewer employees these days which can add weeks, or even months, to a project. Wind resistant and "green" materials, as well as standard materials such as wallboard, often aren't kept in large supply by warehouses and have to be ordered. All this raises havoc with our timetables."

A stickler for meeting deadlines, Karcher learned from family members about integrity and accountability. "The goal has always been to make a firm commitment to a job well done and satisfy the customer to the best of my ability," Karcher's said. These principles now have carried over to the next generation: three adult daughters, Angela, Liza and Miriah. Angela was the office manager for Karcher Construction Inc. for 5 years, Liza is employed





there now, and Miriah is a graduate student of architecture at the University of Florida.

Will the young ladies take over the company someday? Karcher prefers not to predict the future. "They may have their own ideas," he said. Add to this team the experienced and loyal Jill Colledge, who has been with the company 30 years. Colledge began working part-time in the office, doing the paperwork and coordinating the fieldwork required for a construction job. Today she is project manager and Karcher's "right hand." Karcher knows her value and describes Colledge as "a walking encyclopedia" of the trade. She is very "talented" and "respected" by the contractors and clients with whom she interfaces.

When asked to describe a typical day in the life of Dan Karcher, Karcher said, "There is no such thing. Every day is different and that's the way I like it." Karcher does have a routine, however varied, that includes meeting with customers, estimating, site visits and conferring with the staff at his office located at 2279 Tall Pines Dr. in Largo. There also are continuing education classes to be taken, as required for a contractor to be state certified, as he is, with projects totaling more than \$100 million across the state.

To enhance the knowledge gleaned from workshops designed especially for contractors, Karcher enlisted for several years as his business coach Henry Goudreau, a civil engineer and former construction firm owner. "I truly recommend coaching as an

opportunity to learn and improve. It is important to listen to industry associates and not become stale or short-sighted," Karcher said.

As Dan Karcher Construction Inc. transitioned from a small general construction company into a diverse company, Karcher and wife Diann juggled personal growth with growth of the business. Karcher refuses to be completely absorbed by his work, taking time out for fly fishing at the Florida Keys several times a year, and to travel abroad. He and Diann have visited the Emerald Isles and the Tuscany region in Italy.

"I love the outdoors and fly fishing is a good way to enjoy it. I find the sport peaceful and challenging," said Karcher. "The spring and the fall are the best times to fish. Casting a rod gives me a chance to unwind and put things in perspective, so I'm ready for the next challenge."

"Traveling has been inspirational," said Karcher, leading him to the building of bungalows influenced by architecture in Key West. And with ideas flowing from his Tuscany visit, Karcher recently built a palatial structure on the Intracoastal Waterway, its design reflecting the southern European part of the globe. He worked with the same homeowner on several houses and renovations. "That is probably the biggest reward of the business," said Karcher, "When we capture the dreams and visions of homeowners and they come back to us as repeat customers."