

Home Real Estate

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DO UNTO OTHERS: Terri Grasso and her family moved to Florida from New York with the intention of contracting Len Gluckstal, right, of Golden Rule Development Corp. to build their home. Construction of Grasso's new home in the Tidewater Island development will be complete at the beginning of the year.

Luxury builder lives, works by Golden Rule

Developer sets up stringent standards

By STACIE ZINN
Special to The News-Press

Len Gluckstal, president of Golden Rule Development, spent 30 years building apartments and offices in New York City before moving to Southwest Florida in the mid-1990s.

In New York he employed a staff of 60 craftsmen who did his construction work. But Gluckstal had a rude awakening when he tried to convert to working with subcontractors to do his masonry, carpentry, electrical, plumbing and air condi-

tioning work in Lee and Collier counties. He no longer had control over how the craftsmen did their jobs.

It was after building his own home in the Fort Myers community of The Forest, along with a model and a second home for clients in Vineyards in North Naples, that he was convinced that there had to be a better way to build houses.

"I had become a little annoyed with some of the subcontractors. The subcontractors I had used before weren't performing, weren't providing the normal inspections that they would

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GOLDEN: Inspections done six times before closing

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normally do on their own personnel to make sure the work was being done right because they were too busy. It was very frustrating to have incompetent people working on the job and have the subcontractor not supervising their people like they used to," Gluckstal said.

"I realized that this must be a problem out there for everybody. So I started marketing myself to provide inspection services on new construction for people who were having houses built. And what I discovered was that there were disasters left and right that were just going on throughout the industry."

Gluckstal recounted several stories about home inspection clients — he said he's inspected more than 400 homes in the past three years — whose homes were so sloppily built that without him catching mistakes there would have been major problems.

For example, there was the stilt home on Sanibel Island where the pilings were too high and, if not caught in time, would have made the house taller than local restrictions.

And the Fort Myers house that should have had coffered ceilings but the builder ordered flat trusses instead. Without an inspection before the drywall was installed, that home buyer would have had to live with 10-foot high flat ceilings rather than the 13-foot high detailed ceilings they wanted.

Gluckstal said he inspects new homes under construction six times before a buyer closes on the home.

■ **First inspection:** At the time the slab is poured.

■ **Second inspection:** After cinder blocks and tie beams are installed.

■ **Third inspection:** Framing inspection to be sure the 2-by-4s are plumb and straight.

■ **Fourth inspection:** Electrical, plumbing and air conditioning checked. Can be done during framing inspection.

■ **Fifth inspection:** When house is about 85 percent complete, inspection of drywall, cabinetry, tile.

■ **Final inspection:** Once house is complete.

Inspection services for a 2,400-square-foot home under construction are priced at \$1,075. Inspection of an older home of

the same size runs \$240.

Gluckstal continues to inspect homes for buyers of both new construction and resale homes, but his passion is building homes himself. Since 1997 he's built only four homes in Southwest Florida priced from \$420,000 to \$700,000.

Terri Grasso, her husband Tony and their young son Danny are having a home built by Golden Rule in the community of Tidewater Island south of Fort Myers.

Grasso said her sister, a neighbor of Gluckstal's, introduced them.

"He showed us his house and houses he had done in Naples and we were satisfied," Grasso said.

The Grassos expect to move into their new home in January.

"So far everything is going very smoothly. He calls us all the time with our progress," Terri Grasso said. "We've heard horror stories about what goes on with builders and we're not experiencing any of that. He's always there doing something and making sure that the subcontractors are doing the right thing."

Mike Lyon, an air conditioning subcontractor with Service Experts of Southwest Florida Inc., has worked with Gluckstal for the past four years. He said Gluckstal operates in a way that is different from most home builders.

"He's very particular. He's on site more than most contractors," Lyon said. "Most contractors leave it up to the subcontractor to do the job and if it passes inspections it's okay."

Lyon also said Gluckstal checks every step of the building process with every subcontractor he hires.

And this behavior doesn't sit well with every tradesman. "Some trades don't like to have someone looking over their shoulder," Lyon said.

The word that best describes Gluckstal, Lyon said, is "picky." While Gluckstal's pickiness may be disturbing to some subcontractors, it's OK with Lyon. "A picky artist is more concerned about the details," Lyon said. "Obviously, because he's so picky, the job is going to come out better."

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GOLDEN RULE

■ **WHAT:** Luxury home builder and home inspector

■ **WHERE:** Lee, Collier and Charlotte counties

■ **HOME COST:** \$420,000 to \$700,000

■ **INSPECTION COST:** \$1,075 for a 2,400-square-foot home under construction; \$240 for the same size existing home.

■ **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** (941) 432-0178