

THE HEART OF A BUILDER:

HOW A FOUNDATION OF GRATITUDE BUILDS
BOTH EXCEPTIONAL HOMES AND COMMUNITY

ARTICLE MELINDA GIPSON
PHOTOGRAPHY MEGAN WAGONER

MAYBE THE BIGGEST LESSON COVID HAS TAUGHT US IS THAT ALL THAT WE ARE, WE LEARNED AT HOME.

It was at home, as a first-generation son of Irish-born parents that Matt Bowe's dream of being a builder took shape. His 15th year of building and renovating homes in and around Loudoun County gave him the opportunity to reflect on what brings meaning to the work he does.

"Home has always been a sanctuary for me," he said. "It's where we share family meals with loved ones and where we've celebrated; it's been a place of peace. The reason I build,

I realized, is so that I can create for our clients that same environment for their families."

So, you might say that it's out of gratitude that he decided to commemorate the 15th year of Matthew Bowe Design Build by giving back to the community that has supported him for so long. Beginning in May, he announced that he planned to donate \$1,500 for every new client that came on board, distributing it among three charities: Tree of Life Ministry, representing food security; Loudoun Habitat for Humanity, which is committed to housing stability; and the Loudoun Abused

Women's Shelter (LAWS), which fights against domestic violence and abuse.

"We picked these organizations because we felt they addressed conditions that have to exist for a great home life. I've always had a wonderful home life, going back to the way I was raised by my parents to the home that my wife and I have created for our children and now grandchildren." Appreciating how blessed he's been, he realizes, "That is not the case for a lot of people; home is not that wonderful place that they can escape to and shut the world out."

It soon became apparent that Matt's \$1,500 pledge was really intended all along



to be a \$15,000 commitment spread among the three charities over the course of his 15th anniversary year, and that gaining new business wasn't going to be a condition of fulfilling this commitment.

"Everyone knows the adage it's better to give than to receive. Everyone can recall an instance when they reached out to meet someone's need and were blessed by it. You don't do it for that reason, but you can expect [a positive outcome] because, in my mind, that's when you're fully in line with how God created us. If you know Christ, if you know God, and if you are aligning your

life in such a way that you're about serving others, then good things flow"

He calls the current pandemic and social turmoil "spiritually oppressive for our country," but adds, "I just try to maintain a spirit of gratitude. It only takes a moment to pause and consider the suffering of others."

One of his favorite biblical parables is the Parable of the Three Servants. A man gives each of his three servants money to steward, and to the one who best multiplied those resources, he gave more. It may be less scriptural, but another favorite adage is, "God can't fill my cup unless I

continue to pour it out. He wants me to be a conduit and to use the natural gifts He's given me. Everyone has to find that balance of supplying their needs and then allowing the surplus to flow through to others."

In the meantime, he gets to do what he loves, which is building. "Beyond what a home can become, I love building, I love the construction, the hectic bustle of a job site, and the problem solving, I just love doing it."

"There are other builders building grander houses in the county," Matt says, but what his team of seven employees does is different. Every project involves every team

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member from start to finish, so there’s a plan in place for every design element from the ground up prior to construction – every decision is extremely well documented and managed, with a tight budget control process.

All that goes back to the concept of being a good steward and – no surprise here – of emulating his parents’ work ethic. Because most of Matt’s clients are 60 or older, they’re often “downsizing” into a home that will be a perfect fit. They place a high value on quality and durability, which translates to lower maintenance and lower operating costs. “That’s a big focus of what we do...each client trusts us with a considerable investment that took a lifetime to accumulate and asks us to make their dream come true. We want to honor that trust by providing them with the best experience and the most value possible,” Matt says.

The firm is very careful about how many projects it takes on, building just five to six projects per year, depending on the mix of remodeling versus new construction, but Matt admits a fondness for projects that present a challenge.

Just the latest example: When a house in Lovettsville burned down, the owners wanted to reconstruct the Queen Anne Victorian...reimagined for today’s more open spaces but without losing its historic “heart.” That heart consisted of an original 1800-era log cabin, complete with fireplace and chimney. After the fire, all that stood was that fireplace and chimney, but Matt couldn’t find trades who wanted to undertake the challenge of underpinning it with a new foundation.

Eventually, a plan was developed and a team was assembled and through painstaking shoring, excavation and underpinning, the fireplace was saved. Matt also brought in a sawyer to mill live-edge planks from

the salvaged logs of the original cabin. When re-installed on the walls of the new living room, complete with chinking between the planks, and tobacco wood flooring, the home’s living room will still feel like the original log cabin. “It’s a bit quirky for a Queen Anne Victorian,” but it meant the world to the homeowners who desired to hold onto the character of the original home and to imagine all the generations, past and future, who are warmed by that same fireplace.

“For us that’s a typical project,” Matt says with a smile, “there’s always something unique that speaks to the owner. I’m not saying we can make everything happen but so far, we have always found a way,” whether it’s to preserve a 200 year old fireplace or dig and pour a new foundation and basement under Middleburg’s historic Goodstone Inn, installing a new kitchen, all while the Inn was in operation.

“They can be brutal but I love them because they require you diving in and figuring it out in a way that most people can’t see is possible. I am driven by what is possible,” Matt explains.

In short, to properly weigh a decade and a half of accomplishment by Matthew Bowe Design Build, you must go deeper than the cursory curbside view. We celebrate how Matt’s foundation of gratitude and service to others can fuel a passion to see what’s possible, and then make it happen. whether that’s building extraordinary, unique homes or an even more exceptional community.

See <https://matthewbowedesignbuild.com/> or follow their unique projects on facebook. You can learn more about the charities Matt supports at <http://www.tolministries.org/>, <https://www.loudounhabitat.org/>, and <https://www.lcsj.org/>.



Preserving the Hearth



Downsizing in Style



A Porch Worth Living In



Casting the Vision