



Braselton Homes

Long-time builder has laid the foundation of today's Corpus Christi

by Kirsten Voinis

The Braselton family has shaped today's Corpus Christi, from downtown to its suburbs.

Three generations of the family have been building in Corpus Christi since 1945, when the late Guy Braselton, a carpenter by training, started Braselton Construction Co. Today, his son, Fred, and grandson, Bart, operate Braselton Homes, which has built custom and production homes in the city for more than three decades.

Company and City Grow Together

The Braselton's Coastal Bend roots run deep. Guy Braselton, who left school to support his 10 brothers and sisters as a carpenter, replanted the family tree from Abilene to Corpus Christi. Braselton, who was visiting the city on a job, fell in love with the bay, according to his grandson.

While Guy Braselton — who died about nine years ago at the age of 90 — started his company as a home building business, it became the largest commercial contrac-



tor in Corpus Christi and built much of the city's downtown.

He later pioneered the technology for pre-stressed concrete slabs and started a new company, The Prescon Corp., which eventually opened offices across the United States and overseas.

Guy's son, Fred, returned to Corpus Christi and the family business after quarterbacking Georgia Tech's football team. He worked for Prescon for 12 years before he and his wife started Braselton Homes in 1973, leaving the commercial construction business to his brothers.

"My wife, Vanessa, began selling real estate and came home one day to say, 'We can build better homes than the houses I see to sell,'" said Fred Braselton, president of Braselton Homes.

He described the new home building company as a "sideline," as he also co-owned an aluminum die casting company at the time.

"It was kind of a lark as we started it with some church friends of ours," he recounted. "After we bought them out, we began concentrating on large custom homes, as my wife is a very accomplished designer and decorator."

At age 69, Fred Braselton said he's "sort of retired" because he allows himself an easier schedule.

"I stay involved because it is an exciting business, and I feel I can still make some important contributions to the operation," he said.

"He talks about partially retiring but never gets around to it," said his son, Bart, vice president of the company. "He'll be running this company as long as he wants to."

Bart joined Braselton Homes in 1988 after graduating in 1987 from the University of Texas at Austin with degrees in finance and real estate. But his home building experience — like that of children of many

Continued on page 58



“No matter the size our company grows to, there will always be a Braselton in each Braselton home.”
— Bart Braselton.



BUILDER PROFILE

Continued from page 57

builders — actually started years earlier on job sites performing tasks such as digging ditches and cleaning gutters.

“Home building and land development was in my blood,” Bart Braselton said. “I like the smell of sawdust and new carpet. It feels like I’m at home.”

Before Bart Braselton joined the company, the state’s economic downturn in the mid 1980s had Fred and Vanessa Braselton thinking about getting out of the home building business.

“When Bart decided to make home building his life’s work, that spurred us on to help him get established,” Fred Braselton said. “As things began to get back to normal here in South Texas after the depression of 1986, we began to see how we could grow and make the company successful.”

Family Is the Company’s Strength

Even though it has grown from two employees to 30 employees in the last decade, the company remains a family business. In addition to Fred and Bart, other family members in the business are

Fred’s wife, Vanessa, and daughter, Ronna Ohmstede. Vanessa, co-founder of Corpus Christi’s most successful decorating center, now exclusively decorates and designs for Braselton Homes. Vanessa Braselton and Ohmstede decorate and merchandise the company’s model homes and have won several awards in the process.

“No matter the size our company grows to, there will always be a Braselton in each Braselton home,” said Bart Braselton.

Family involvement, said Fred Braselton, “is the best way to go. No one has more interest in making your company work than your family. We all share the same enthusiasm for what we do, and we all work hard at it.”

Whether Bart Braselton’s three children — a 13-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son and stepson — take up the family trade remains to be seen.

“I am proud and protective of our heritage, and I want each home to be constructed right,” Bart Braselton said. “My grandfather used to always tell me how we builders have the best job; we get to take something from paper to completion, and when we are done, there is a lasting monument to our work and dedication. I still love that quote, and this job.”

Braselton Changes Mission

Braselton Homes grew to be Corpus Christi's largest custom home builder, completing 10 to 20 homes per year. But the Braseltons wanted to grow their company and decided it would not be possible to expand their home completions if they stayed in the custom home building business.

About nine years ago, the company changed direction and converted to production home building, focusing on building its own subdivisions.

The switch wasn't simple; in the past 10 years, the company has added many employees, revamped its sales force, twice reorganized its structure, redefined job descriptions and formalized policies and procedures.

For example, the company adopted specific warranty procedures and a start slot system for starting homes to make the company more efficient and maintain a high customer satisfaction rate. Braselton Homes' start slot system allows it to better allocate its manpower so it can start more homes with fewer workers. Home starts are planned two months in advance and begin on carefully chosen, specific dates.

"This allows us to organize our subcontractor base and work them much more efficiently," Bart Braselton said. "It also allows our sales people to know when they sell a house, when that house will be started. They also know what spec homes will be available and when."

To other home builders considering a major change in their mission, he advised, "Hang on for the ride. It's a tremendous change when you go from the model of the custom home builder to that of a production home builder. Our goal then was to build the best house in Corpus Christi. Our goal now is to build the best housing value."

As a custom home builder, Braselton Homes built 20 to 30 houses per year; now it builds as many as 140 homes per year.

"It took us 25 years to reach our 500th home, but less than five years to reach our 1,000th home," Bart Braselton said.

Production Builder, Custom Touches

Buyers will still find a little bit of that custom home building background in every production home completed by Braselton Homes. The company strives to add detail and craftsmanship to each of its homes, whether it's through the use of crown molding and trim, art niches in the wall or eight-foot arched room openings.

In addition, customers can choose from about 20 standard options to add to a floor plan, such as inserting a bay window into a master bedroom or converting a living room to a study. The company's award-winning decorating team of Vanessa Braselton and Ronna Ohmstede can help customers choose from an array of colors and other upgrades, such as Corian countertops or upgraded light fixtures, to further individualize a home.

"Our customers can personalize their home so it can be exactly what they want," Bart Braselton said. "It's important that our customers feel they can create their own homes."

Although the company works with architects nationwide to develop about half its floor plans, designing most of the plans in-house is the part of the business he enjoys most.

"It's fascinating to watch a two-dimensional dream become a 3-D reality," he said.

Braselton Embracing New Challenges

As much as Braselton Homes has grown, it's not standing still. About five years ago,

Continued on page 62

www.norandexreynolds.com



VISIT ONE OF THESE LOCATIONS:

PROTECT the homes you build with Polar Wall® Plus! Insulated Siding & Windows

Over time a home's exterior can take a beating from high winds, damaging hail, the suns weathering, and even kids playing ball. That's why Norandex/Reynolds introduced the Polar Wall® Plus! Exterior System. Like a baseball catcher protecting home plate against the opposing team, Polar Wall® Plus! Siding and Windows protect your home against its greatest rival, the elements!


NORANDEX/REYNOLDS
An Owens Corning Business
www.norandexreynolds.com

NORANDEX/REYNOLDS

Dallas, TX 75247
(214)631-1471
(800)289-8274
Fax(214)905-0504

Houston, TX 77018
(713)691-4111
(800)283-8274
Fax(713)691-4140

Lubbock, TX 79404
(806)765-9600
(800)374-7895
Fax(806)765-0300

April 12, Office and Subcontractor Relations, 1-5 p.m., HBA of Greater Dallas. Register at www.dallasbuilders.com. Contact (972) 931-4840.

April 17, Designing for the Active Adult, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

April 17-18, Understanding Housing Markets & Consumers (NAHB), 9 a.m.-5 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

April 18, 2006 International Residential Code Training (Plumbing), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

April 18-20, Certified New Home Sales Professional Course, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

April 19, Essential Building Skills (Roofing/Waterproofing), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

April 24, Sales and Marketing (NAHB), 9 a.m.-4 p.m. HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

April 25, 2006 International Residential Code Training (Mechanical), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

April 25, Financial Management, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

April 26, Scheduling, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

April 26, Essential Building Skills (HVAC/Environmental), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

April 26, Land Acquisition & Development Finance (GMB), 9:30 a.m., HBA of Greater Dallas. Register at www.dallasbuilders.com. Contact (972) 931-4840.

May 3, Essential Building Skills (Electrical), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 5, RCS-General Project Management, 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 5, RCS-Codes and Quality Control, 1:30-4:30 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 7, Construction Contracts and Law, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 7, BAR and PREP, 1-5 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 10, CEI-Energy Code Update, 4-6 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 10, Essential Building Skills (Plumbing), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 15, Profitable Business Through Quality Practices, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 16, Essential Closing Strategies, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 16, 2006 International Residential Code Training (Electrical), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 17, Multicultural Sales, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 17, Essential Building Skills (Drywall/Insulation), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 18, Market Focused Residential Design, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 19, RCS-Planning and Scheduling, 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 19, RCS-Budget Management and Cost Control, 1:30-4:30 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 23, Off-Site Project Management, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Greater Houston BA. Contact (281) 970-8970 ext. 161, or pmeans@ghba.org.

May 23, 2006 International Residential Code Training (Finals, Certificates), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 24, Essential Building Skills (Review), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 29, Building Technology: Structures and Exterior Finishes (NAHB), 9 a.m.-4 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

May 30, BAR exam, 9 a.m.-Noon, Hill Country HBA, Church of Christi on Loop 534. Contact (830) 895-5424.

May 31, Essential Building Skills (Roundtable and Certification), 4-6 p.m., HBA of Greater Austin. Register at www.AustinHomeBuilders.com.

June 15, On-site Project Management, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Hill Country HBA, Church of Christi on Loop 534. Contact (830) 895-5424. ■

CGR = Certified Graduate Remodelor • CGB = Certified Graduate Builder • CGA = Certified Graduate Associate • GMB = Graduate Master Builder

BUILDER PROFILE

Continued from page 59

having heavily penetrated the family home market, it began exploring niche markets to develop, including vacation homes, town homes and even another high-value home production line.

Its newest venture is building beach cottages on Mustang Island. These casual homes differ from a traditional family in that they will have more, but smaller, bedrooms; a bigger common living area; one large bunk room; more bathrooms; and no carpeting on the first floor.

To break into this new market, the Braseltons made several research visits to Florida beach communities.

"The way you live in a vacation house is completely different than the way you live at home," Bart Braselton said.

Braselton Homes also will add town homes to the 300-acre master-planned community it has developed and built, Rancho Vista.

The Braseltons also are concentrating on another venture, Premiere Homes by Braselton, which they started about two years ago to build homes with a lower per-square-foot cost.

The company's five-year plan projects its expansion into other nearby cities around the Corpus Christi Bay.

"The Lord has been good to us," Bart Braselton said. "We do our research, and we try to really study the market and find what area is not being served and then go to that market."

Keys to Success?

Braselton Homes has belonged to the Builders Association Corpus Christi Area and the Texas Association of Builders for 25

years, and Fred Braselton is a past president of the local HBA. Company owners appreciate their membership particularly for the valuable building-related information, such as state windstorm rules updates, as well as local and state legislative information and representation in the political process.

The Braseltons also attribute their professional success to hard work, planning, prayer and a lot of luck. The company works hard to meet its goal, which is to deliver the "Best Housing Value in Corpus Christi."

"My dad has always told me, 'the harder you work, the luckier you get,'" Bart Braselton said.

Fred Braselton explained, "Things most often don't just drop out of the sky for you; hard work and diligent effort often create opportunities that you can easily miss or overlook if you're not paying attention." ■