

Builder/Architect



Camelot/Signature Development, LLC's partners Norm Cohen and Howard Zuckerman have been building housing for the active adult since 2000.

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By Tracey Viars

Partners Howard Zuckerman and Norman Cohen, hailing from different backgrounds, with different styles and different perspectives, agreed on a few key principles when they decided to pair their talents and resources to form Camelot/Signature Development, LLC. A strict adherence to sound business practices combined with an enormous passion for meeting the needs of the active adult market, mixed with some tough lessons learned in the condominium market in the 1980s, are the impetus for Zuckerman and Cohen's success in the Atlanta condominium market.

Camelot/Signature Development, LLC, has been swiftly carving out a niche for itself in the active adult housing market since its inception in 2000, with its unique single-family detached homes, cottage homes and town home product offerings. And as many satisfied homeowners will attest, the communities built by the company do, in fact, provide the idyllic standards and lifestyle befitting the company's namesake, King Arthur's Camelot.

Zuckerman and Cohen first became interested in the active adult market in the late 1990s, as Zuckerman was putting together a financing deal for

an assisted-living facility near what would eventually become Camelot's first community, Settlers Walk. Cohen reveals, "As we started doing some investigation, we realized that people over 55 years old controlled between 72 and 75 percent of the wealth in this country, and with the baby-boomer generation coming of age, we knew there would be an emerging need for active adult housing for some time to come." The pair began to do in-depth research in an effort to conceptualize how their company might provide superior quality housing to this market segment.

As incoming chairman in 2006 of the National Homebuilder's Association's Senior Housing Council, Norman Cohen is not only personally, but also professionally dedicated to this category, as is his partner Howard Zuckerman. Making a comparison to the 1980s condominium market, Zuckerman reports, "Today's condominium buyer has changed. There is a whole new set of dynamics in place."

In an effort to better understand and meet the demands of this growing and constantly changing market segment, the partners are firm believers

Open floor plans with natural sunlight are popular with home buyers.



PHOTO BY KATHY WOLF

in ongoing research. Seeking out the best and the brightest consultants in the fields of architecture, marketing, value appraisal, land planning and engineering prior to breaking ground is one of the ways they learn about the market. Walking the community and listening to residents talk about what they like and don't like is another way. As Cohen explains, "Our research is ongoing and on many different levels." Taking what they've learned, interpreting the information and using it to tailor and tweak the products and communities to meet the target home buyer's needs and desires, is a strategy that has worked well for both the company and the home buyers.

One surprising trend uncovered by their recent research, is the willingness of today's buyer to take out a mortgage at 55 years of age and older — a trend that was not seen in earlier generations. Additionally, single females are making up a larger part of today's home-buying market, leading Camelot to offer what Zuckerman likes to call "lock and leave." Basically, with all of the yard maintenance, painting and other outside maintenance taken care of, clients can lock up the house and leave for 30 days without worrying about what they'll be coming home to. It's a lifestyle that many single female buyers, ages 35 to 55 prefer, and one that has been drawing single males and working couples without children to the company's properties as well. Home buyers take further comfort in the excellent warranty program offered by Camelot.

Another important trend the company has discovered is the desire by the 55-plus population to stay within a five-mile radius of their previous

home, keeping friendships, church affiliations and relationships with service providers like doctors and hairdressers intact. To meet this need, Camelot has sought to build and develop in convenient, suburban in-fill locations.

Additionally, research has revealed the fact that although the 55-plus crowd feels a need to downsize as far as square footage in their homes is concerned, they have no interest in feeling like a lifestyle change requires sacrifice. Ever sensitive to this issue, Zuckerman explains, "We take every opportunity we can to add volume into our homes by including such features as vaulted and two-story ceilings, so that home buyers can still enjoy a spacious comfort within their homes." Separate dining rooms and well-equipped kitchens help homeowners continue to gather with family and friends as they have in the past. Model homes, are outfitted in a way to give the sense that you've invaded someone's personal home in an attempt to realistically illustrate the many positive aspects of what can be a time of apprehension for some buyers on the brink of a lifestyle change.

Although the company doesn't claim to specialize in housing for the disabled, the homes include features aimed at helping homeowners grow into their surroundings. Features, such as master bedrooms on the main floor, wide door openings and hallways, large five-foot showers with a thin entry edge and grab bars, lever door handles, light switches with toggles and a no-step entry points are a few of the many built-in amenities that provide the opportunity for homeowners to

Simplicity and serenity are the intended elements of this master suite.



Spacious master baths include five-foot showers, with thin entry edge and grab bars to help homeowners grow into their surroundings.





Active adults don't have to choose between convenience and style with features like double tray ceilings, 10-foot ceilings and crown moulding.



Kitchens are designed with entertaining in mind.



Spacious master suites are located on the main level.



Craftsman-style bungalows offer a rear entrance garage with no steps.



PHOTO BY KATHY WOLF

Design meets functionality, creating livable homes.

stay in their homes, even as they age. Many of the neighborhoods also include a Clubhouse to encourage social interaction among residents by providing areas for hosting parties, playing bridge, holding prayer meetings and other social events.

Because both Zuckerman and Cohen had previously spent time working in the custom high-end housing market, Camelot has been adept at including features to give a high-end feel to the homes. As Cohen states, "We've been able to include some features that do not actually cost much, but give a really nice look and feel to the home." Such features include smooth ceilings, double-treyed ceilings in the master bedrooms and showers outfitted in simulated fiberglass tile for the look of tile without the chore of cleaning grout.

A customized look is also achieved on the interiors by allowing the home buyers to choose from a broad range of colors and finishes to suit their individual tastes. According to Zuckerman, "We are really good at building houses, but the customer is the one who makes a home out of it." To achieve an individual identity for each unit on the exterior, 12 to 15 different brick and paint selections are combined to give enough variation to avoid the barracks or apartment appearance that often plagues condominium and townhouse communities.

Due to their high level of expertise in the active adult market and in land planning and development, Zuckerman and Cohen have been sought out for their knowledge and advice by the industry. Both partners have

given of their time and expertise — Cohen sits on the National Home Builder's Association's Senior Housing Council, and Zuckerman recently lended his talents pro bono to develop workforce housing projects in Cobb County as a way to give back to the communities and the industry that have supported them so well.

As far as the company's future outlook, Zuckerman and Cohen expect to continue to offer maintenance-free and high-style living to the active adult population in and around Atlanta. In addition to its core business, the company is also looking into the possibilities of some joint ventures in Hilton Head, SC, and other cities throughout Georgia. And the company will continue to develop land to sell to other builders.

Commenting on future growth, both Zuckerman and Cohen agree, "We don't want to become big, just less small." Understanding the cyclical nature of the economy, Camelot will continue to build smaller communities where they can see the beginning and end in 18 months to two years. Zuckerman exclaims, and Cohen confers, "We still get excited when we come in on Monday morning and there are four or five contracts on our desks. It kind of validates what we are doing." But both partners are quick to admit, "The best measure of success is hearing from happy homeowners who are thriving in their new homes and new lifestyles."

For more information about Camelot/Signature Development, LLC, call 678.290.9143, or to view the company's communities, please visit their Web site at www.camelotsignature.com. ■