

Boone Sets Sights on IAQ Preferences
by John R. Hall
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Dr. Ernest Coburn, an Abingdon, Va., developer (left), holds a meeting to discuss plans for his new development, in which HVAC contractor Terry Boone (foreground) plays a prominent role.

ABINGDON, Va. — Virginia contractor Terry Boone, owner of Perfect Air of Abingdon, has become a familiar face to The NEWS' readers.

Boone typifies many HVAC contractors who struggle to keep their hands out of the business while trying to build it up. He has taken the advice of several business consultants, and although transitioning from a struggling service and replacement contractor in a small market to an up-and-coming residential new construction market has been tough and often frustrating, Boone appears to be turning the corner and finally carving out a niche.

Boone is becoming part of a project that will reach out to people all across America, from Chicago to New York to Southern communities. Targeted people include upper-middle class retirees or empty nesters who are looking to move from a larger metropolitan area to a smaller community with great amenities, all the while being able to enjoy the four seasons each year. Abingdon is being marketed as such a community.

Boone is working with Dr. Ernest Coburn, an Abingdon developer and local business owner who is the architect of the new Piper Spring development, a community of mixed homes, townhouses, and cottages in a 116-acre setting. Groundbreaking for the first model home was scheduled for late October 2006.

Boone's role, along with his local American Standard and Honeywell distributors, is to provide the HVAC system for each unit and IAQ products that meet the Health House® requirements of the American Lung Association (ALA).

Darrell Bratton, sales representative for American Standard distributor Lyon, Conklin & Co. Inc. in Christianburg, Va., has been working with Boone for the past two years, providing support for the Piper Spring project while it was in the formative stages.

“We plan to support Dr. Coburn in whatever way he wants to market the development,” said Bratton. He also noted that American Standard has chosen the homes to be part of its All-American Home Program, which involves rebates for installed HVAC and plumbing equipment.

Don Vogt, residential application specialist for Honeywell Automation and Control Solutions, Nashville, Tenn., said that his company has partnered with the ALA because the ALA standards ensure that homes are the healthiest possible based on testing and up-to-date technology.

“We are the only IAQ company that is ALA-approved,” he said. “All of our equipment meets or exceeds ALA requirements.

“But the equipment also has to be installed correctly by a qualified contractor, such as Terry Boone, and pass inspection. It is important to us that the job is done right. I have seen all kinds of work and the quality isn’t always what it should be.”

One of the Health House requirements is that there must not be more than a 5 percent energy loss and have a positive pressure. The ductwork must be properly sealed with virtually no leakage at all.

A third-party inspector must inspect each stage of the home construction. The problem is that the closest inspector to Abingdon is five hours away. Coburn asked for permission to photograph various stages of the construction and e-mail the photos to the inspector to save delays in the project.

“The inspector needs to be here from the start to ensure the foundation has a proper vapor barrier and drainage runoff,” said Coburn.

He is also aware that all of the extra steps and IAQ products will add to the construction costs but he believes those costs can be recovered. “With a better product we can ask for a better price,” he said. “We feel this is an important project for our area.

“Southern Virginia is one of the elite retirement communities in the United States. It is attractive to people who are retiring and moving here. They can save money and the Health House option looks very attractive.”

THE LATEST MEETING

On the day of The NEWS visit, Coburn met with Boone, Bratton, Vogt, and the builder, Danny Houchins of Hoburn Construction, the company co-owned by Houchins and Coburn. A local newspaper reporter, Debra McCown of the Bristol Herald Courier, was invited to sit in on the meeting and ask questions about the project.

Coburn said his goal was to have the first model home built by spring 2007. It is to be constructed as a Health House. He would like every home in the development to be a Health House but he will wait and see what the buyers are looking for.

He said that consumers can learn about the Health House programs and what builders are constructing these homes by visiting the ALA Health House Website.

“I believe in healthy homes,” said Coburn. “I’d like to see 100 percent of homes in our subdivision cooperating with the Health House concept.”

The unique partnership between Boone, Bratton, and Vogt make this a special project, too. Some of the IAQ products for the Health House are made both by Honeywell and American Standard. Boone could have used all American Standard products for the homes, but he has a longstanding relationship with Honeywell and wants to continue using their products.

“We understand Terry’s position with Honeywell, and we can work together to make this a success,” said Bratton.

Boone reflected on the origins of the project. “I met with Honeywell 10 years ago with IAQ ideas but back then there were no builders who would touch something like a Health House,” he said. “I met Dr. Coburn eight years ago and we began talking then about such a project.”

Boone is working very hard to get the first system in the model home and make it attractive to prospective Piper Spring homeowners. He is not planning on making money on this first home. But he plans on there being many more to come. “I’ll make money on the back end,” he said.

Bratton complimented Boone on his dedication to making this project a success — it reflects on Terry’s business practices. “Terry goes to a lot of classes and is well-trained,” he said. “He is very qualified to do this.”

Boone said that a key to the project — and any project for that matter — is having a good relationship with the local inspector. He has known the inspector for years and has discussed the Piper Spring project at length with him. “He said he will be very cooperative,” said Boone.

The success of the project, besides the important contributions from American Standard and Honeywell, are based on two keys: having a good contractor and an efficient inspection process. It appears that Terry Boone and his company has positioned itself for success. This is one time when being hands-on is the key. Let’s wait and see.

Visit www.healthhouse.org for more information about Health House programs.

Sidebar: Times Are Busy

ABINGDON, Va. — If it weren’t for inventions and hotels, Danny Browning might not be as busy as he’d like to be. And if it weren’t for fellow Abingdon contractor, Terry Boone, Browning might be getting a little more ink in The NEWS.

Browning is the general manager of Advanced Heating & Air Conditioning, located only a few miles from Boone’s Perfect Air of Abingdon. Browning became familiar to The NEWS’ readers in July 2005 as his invention — the Clean Cut™ tool — took the first place gold award in the miscellaneous category of The NEWS’ 2005 Dealer Design

Awards (July 18, 2005). The Clean Cut tool from Jade Products, Browning's company, is a clear, see-through shell with a special gloved access designed to minimize cleanup when contractors cut holes in ceilings. The tool is now being sold through EZ Trap Inc. It is shown in the R.E. Michel catalog and will soon be featured in the Shubee catalog, too.

Browning said he is pleased with sales of the Clean Cut, which is manufactured at a separate facility in Abingdon. He has shown the product at several trade shows and it has especially been a hit at remodeling shows. One new product, named Solatube, has become popular recently as a replacement for skylight windows. The Clean Cut makes a perfect tool for cutting holes for this product. Browning noted that doing trade shows is an expense but it is necessary to market the new product. "I don't want to be selling these day in and day out," he said.

That's fair enough because Browning also has a business to run. Advanced has been busy lately working with builders on new hotel construction in the area. He enjoys working with hotels because each presents unique challenges, especially when it comes to bathroom ventilation. "Bathroom ventilation has always been a problem because the bathrooms are built so small and the ventilation is in a confined space," Browning said.

Hotels are important but residential new construction and replacement sales still comprise 70 percent of the Advanced business. He added that his crew (part of a total of seven employees) has been working on residential geothermal projects, too, including installing a geothermal system in a "castle" residence in southern Virginia. The basic components were assembled in his shop, put on a flatbed truck and hauled to the residence, where they were "plugged in" to the system.

Advanced also has a distinct look around town. All of the service vans are painted black. "We are known as the people with the black vans," said Browning. He is also known for his traveling "mini-office." Browning equipped a company van with a desk, chair, and file cabinet where he could sit and prepare his estimates and presentations onsite at the customer's home or business. That's pretty inventive for a guy who keeps finding ways to stay busy.

For more information on the Clean Cut, visit www.jadeproductsllc.com.

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