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Custom Home

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2003 Pacesetter Awards Innovation

Innovation often lies not in creating something new, but in using commonplace things in new and productive ways. Lots of custom builders live out of their laptops; using CAD software for drafting and spreadsheets for scheduling has become routine; and the industry would come to a grinding halt without cell phones and PDAs. But Regency Custom Homes president Steve Wiggins (left with vice president Brian Recher) takes things a big step further, using digital technology in a comprehensive and networked way that remains rare among custom builders. "For some reason," Wiggins says, "we as an industry seem to be neglecting to keep up with the advances in technology." ■ Wiggins uses a homebrewed spreadsheet built with off-the-shelf software to



Steve Wiggins

Regency Custom Homes
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Type of business: custom builder

Years in business: 3

Employees: 2

2002 volume: \$5 million

2002 starts: 7

eliminating the hassle of keeping paper plans current. Working with computer-literate subs allows plan updates to filter quickly and efficiently through the system. "We send our plumber CAD files, so we don't have the jackhammering of slabs anymore," Wiggins says. ■ Networking all company computers makes the company's central database, as well as contracts and project specs, an open book. To keep remote clients apprised of progress on their projects, Wiggins uses the company Web site and e-mail ("The paper trail of e-mail is great," he notes). And how do clients respond when they find a builder who is just as wired as they are? "Some of them are impressed," Wiggins says. "Some of them just expect it, because that's the way things are in their industries." —B.D.S.

create and maintain project schedules. "There are advanced scheduling programs on the market," he says, "but we have found simple spreadsheets can accomplish scheduling tasks easily." A different spreadsheet built with the same software facilitates the company's estimating. "I can just sit down with our spreadsheets and look at all the costs for every project we've ever done," Wiggins says. As a result, estimating is quick and accurate, "even for a \$2 million home." ■ Where Wiggins really got our attention, though, was by distributing computing power throughout his company. Recher loads his own laptop with a complete set of CAD plans for every current project, which he updates by linking to the office server,