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BY MICHELLE KRUEGER

It's a good time to build a new home, according to Brad Ericks, director of operations for Cook Builders.

"While the cost of land has increased significantly over the past few years, home costs have remained fairly stable," he said. "Right now there are a lot of really good contractors out there doing exceptional work at a very fair price."

However, he warns potential new home buyers to be wary of builders or contractors promising to do work at surprisingly low prices. While Cook Builders may not be the cheapest builder in the area, or the most expensive, they have been in business for 34 years and are still going strong to this day.

"The most difficult thing for us to overcome when we meet potential clients is a lack of trust in builders," Ericks said. "Homeowners can bring a lot of baggage to the process. Whether it's from other people's experience or their own, they usually have a number of genuine concerns based on real-life horror stories. First and foremost, we want them to know that Cook Builders has been around for 34 years, and that our business is based on customer referrals."

"Our homeowners are proud to show off their homes and offer their building experience with future homeowners as a reference. We have several homeowners that have told others that they are proud to say that Cook Builders built their home. Two former homeowners that recently moved due to job relocations have even used the phrase 'Built by Cook Builders' in their advertising."

Family owned and operated since 1974, Cook Builders has built some of the finest custom homes in many of Northwest Indiana's most desirable neighborhoods. Ranging in price from the \$200s to well over \$1

million, every Cook Builders-built home is a one-of-a-kind project from start to finish. The same attention to detail, quality products and experienced group of hand-selected subcontractors comes together to make your dream a reality regardless of your budget.

Because a custom home is an extension of every homeowner's personality and taste, it's important to determine from the very beginning exactly what a client is looking for in a home and work towards their budget, according to Richard Cook, president of the family-owned and operated business. From palatial showplaces to strategically-designed spaces for family living and entertaining, the company has built just about everything in between.

Their current model home for sale in St. John's exclusive Lake Hills neighborhood demonstrates some of the finer details Cook Builders can add to your custom home. Located at 8958 Crooked Bend this 2,852 square foot 1.5-story showplace includes 4 bedrooms, with a true main floor master retreat that has an enormous shower and closet.

The stunning great room has a built-in wet bar for entertaining plus a direct vent fireplace with a natural stone surround. The gourmet kitchen includes stainless steel appliances and custom cabinets with granite tops. Attractive hardwood and tile flooring are featured throughout the house as well.

While this home is available for viewing by appointment and is priced at \$559,000, Cook Builders recently completed 1,600 square foot ranch home priced in the lower \$180s on a client's lot in Cedar Lake. Both homes share Cook's custom quality, just on different levels, according to Ericks. Some of the finishing materials may change, but the same high level of quality and attention to detail remain the same.

"Because of our energy-conscious build-

ing practices, ENERGY STAR has recognized us for building 100 percent of our homes in the past two years with 5-Star or 5-Star Plus ratings," he said. "These are the highest ratings possible, which will save each of our homeowners hundreds or thousands of dollars per year in gas and electric consumption."

Cook Builders is happy to build your home on your lot or one of their lots available in Lake Hills, Crown Point's White Hawk Country Club or Feather Rock. Five of their last 10 homes were built for clients who owned their own lots.

"We must be doing something right, as our homeowners and the homes in progress have been the best possible advertising for us," Ericks said. "When someone finally decides to build their home, they stop by our job sites to talk with our subcontractors and even past homeowners before giving us a call."

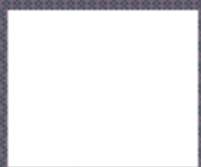
Whether it is your lot or theirs, Cook Builders looks forward to meeting you and discussing your plans for a new custom dream home.

"It's all about the people, and there is a great sense of satisfaction in what we do," Ericks said. "When you enjoy working with people to build their dream home, you go to work looking forward to getting them one step closer to moving into that home. We go beyond needing to do a great job to maintain our reputation. We want to do a great job for them."

FOR MORE INFO

For more information, contact Brad Ericks of Cook Builders at the company's office located at 6919 W. Lincoln Highway, in Crown Point, by calling (219) 322-3303, or log on to www.CookBuilders.com.

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