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Blue Ridge Log Cabins sales on fire, quadrupling business with Internet

Article and Photos by: Trevor Anderson

In order to avoid a panic, Milton "Chip" Smith never says the word "fire" while he's at work.

That is, unless the owner of Blue Ridge Log Cabins in Campobello is describing how hot business has been recently. Since his company began production at its new state-of-the-art, 110,000-square-foot manufacturing plant off I-26 last July, sales have nearly quadrupled, Smith said.

But even in a year filled with personal accolades and new company milestones, he still is looking for future success.

"We do something that I think nobody in the world does," Smith said. "What's neat about our product is (even in the midst of a recession) how passionate our customers are about it. We're on fire."

He accommodates about 500 visitors per month. They are greeted by four of the company's log cabin homes that overlook the southern edge of the Appalachian Mountains.

The company's integration of new building processes and high-tech engineering programs have allowed the company's cabins, which are built at the new facility and assembled on site, to be twice as large as they were when Smith took the helm in 2004. The company's design portfolio also has grown more than four times in size since then.

SIZE, PRICE RANGE

Built primarily of Eastern white pine, his cabin models range from 500 to 5,000 square feet and typically cost \$150,000 to \$200,000. Smith, however, has built homes with price tags of about \$500,000.

"I knew there had to be a better way to build log cabins," Smith said. "We worked hard to develop a system that allows us to build the absolute best log home in the industry, in a time period unmatched by anyone, at a price
(continued on back)

point significantly less than anyone else. Every home we build is a signature home."

The new facility has two production lines that have the capacity for 16 homes to be built at one time. They move down the line via a \$1 million bridge crane system that hangs from the 45-foot-tall ceiling.

"Our employees can work in here rain or shine," Smith said.

Each home is sanded inside and out and carefully inspected by quality control managers, something Smith said not all cabin builders do.

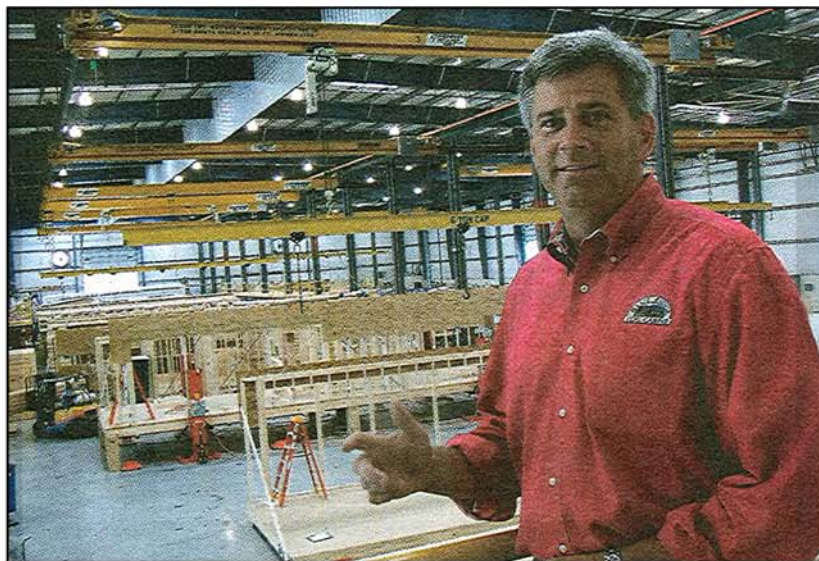
Not a scrap of material is wasted in the production process. Bits of wood that aren't used are shaped into miscellaneous items, such as towel racks or shelves. He also has established his own trucking company, with flatbed trailers delivering the cabins to customers.

RECOGNITIONS AND AWARDS

The company, founded in 1992, finished its 500th home last year and is on pace to build its 600th cabin this year.

Blue Ridge Log Cabins was recognized this month by Inc. magazine as one of the top 5,000 fastest-growing companies in the United States for a second consecutive year. The company was one of only 31 South Carolina companies to make the 2009 list, and it was the only one named from Spartanburg County.

The company was featured on HGTV's "Amazing Log Homes" show last year. It will appear on another HGTV show at 8 a.m. on



Labor Day.

In March, Smith was named the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce's 2009 Small Business Person of the Year.

One of his accomplishments mentioned with the award was the installation of three log cabins donated by his company and other organizations to Glenn Springs Academy, formerly the Spartanburg Boys' Home. The cabins were dedicated in December.

Smith's work force has grown to 100 employees, and the company's sales footprint has expanded from the Southeast to the entire eastern half of the U.S. The company recently delivered a home to customers in Upstate New York near Niagara Falls. It also made a delivery to Devils Tower, Wyo.

"I have the same excitement right now as when I first started," Smith said. "All of my financial advisers tried to discourage me. They said you can't be successful building log

cabins. But I see where we are right now, and it's just amazing."

NEW WEB SITE

Blue Ridge Log Cabins' Web site also is receiving an upgrade. The new site is expected to launch sometime in the next few weeks. The site's interactive features will allow visitors to virtually walk through homes in order to help them select a design.

The old Web site received 2.5 million hits after the first HGTV spot, Smith said. He expects even more after Labor Day, and he understands the importance of the Internet in keeping his company competitive in a global economy.

He said he has responded to customer inquiries from as far away as Australia and China.

"We realized the power of the Internet in marketing," Smith said. "It's really an amazing tool that has infinitely broadened our horizons."

www.BlueRidgeLogCabins.com



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