

First Things First: Strong Leadership Positions 1st American Builders for Continued Growth

By Mir Haynes

For a company that more than doubled its business from 2004 to 2005 (from 71 homes and over \$15 million in revenue to 147 homes and over \$31 million in revenue), it may come as a shock to hear the company president say, "We believe that if we put our faith first and our families second, the business will take care of itself."

That's Michael Dean Chadwick, president of 1st American Builders of Apex, NC. 1st American is involved in the acquisition, development, and construction of single-family and town homes in more than 15 communities throughout the greater Triangle area, including projects in Raleigh, Durham, Fuquay-Varina, Chapel Hill, Cary, and Wake Forest.

Recognized by the Triangle Business Journal in 2005 as one of the best places to work in the Triangle, ranked third in that same year's "50 Fastest Growing Companies," and honored in 2006 with a "40 under 40 Leadership Award" presented to Executive VP Geoff Shiley, 1st American has built a solid reputation in the local business community.

"That recognition," says Chadwick, "is a big privilege and an honor, but getting ranked is not a real priority for us. Why? Because we don't judge our success by those rankings." He continues, "We try to do good things in our communities and in our homeowners' lives. If our homeowners are happy with the job we've done, they'll tell their friends, and we'll sell more houses."

"It's the philosophy of 'What goes around comes around,'" says Chadwick. "When people say that, they don't realize that they're actually quoting an ancient truth: 'Whatever you sow, so shall you reap.' What's really cool about that principle is that it's a law of God; it's like gravity. If you jump off a building, you're going to hit the ground. In the same way, you're going to reap, so be careful what you sow. We try to sow good into other people's lives and expect nothing in return. We absolutely live our lives and run our business with a pay-it-forward attitude. And the results just take care of themselves."

One of the most recent recipients of 1st American's pay-it-forward mentality is the V Foundation for Cancer Research. Last year, 1st American built and sold a charity home, donating over \$100,000 to the V Foundation. Chadwick says they'll be building a charity home again this year to benefit cancer research; it's all a part of his goal to raise a million dollars for the V Foundation over the next 10 years.

He says, "I'm one of those guys that believes we all really do have the opportunity to make a difference, both corporately and individually. Our hope in doing the house for the V Foundation was, obviously, to make a sizable donation, but also to show other builders how we did it. We wanted to see other builders get on board and help the charities of their choice. And that's happened. So far, three local builders have built charity homes, benefiting some great organizations like the Holt Foundation, the House of Hope, and Apex Rotary Club."

Right on the 1st American website (www.1stAmericanBuilder.com), it states: "We believe in giving back to the community and have founded a charitable organization that does just that," referencing nonprofit Mike Chadwick Ministries, which helps troubled youth and people struggling with alcohol and drugs. In addition, Chadwick speaks multiple times a year to groups ranging from civic organizations to collegiate football teams. In fact, he's one of the most requested speakers on the East Coast for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Though he speaks nationwide, Chadwick's heart is right here in North Carolina. Bunn High School football coach, Dave Howle, says, "I have heard a lot of speakers in all my years in education and I can honestly say that Michael Dean is the best. I highly recommend him to speak to young people because he has a very positive influence on their lives."

With so much emphasis on charitable donations and community outreach, how has 1st American also managed to sustain such impressive corporate and financial growth? Chadwick would say that it's precisely because they're committed to putting the first things first.

Chadwick says, "It comes back to reaping what you sow. Around here, we like to say 'Never trust anyone who won't make commitments to you.' Our homeowners put their faith in us. They trust us to keep our commitments. We build homes for families, and we build them one at a time. Everybody has access to me. Homeowners have my home number and can call me at any time. If they have a problem, I want to know about it, and if they want to say thank you, I definitely don't want to miss out on that!"

About the Author

Mir Haynes is a writer and the owner of Anabo Studios. www.AnaboStudios.com