

**2013 – ‘Our customers are better salespeople than we are’ –
Claudia King, Smart Solutions**

February 3, 2016



(Originally published in 2013; author – David Rauzi)

“We’re extremely pleased,” says John Warford.

The Mt. Idaho resident leads a tour — from bathroom to guest room to garage to basement — showing the features that have made for a comfortable home for him and his wife, Kathy. Subtle circular vents circulate air and are situated to provide a fresh draw from outside through the home. Floors are warmed through a hydronic radiant heat system that can be individually managed room to room. Here’s a great glass of water, provided through a passive, salt-free filtration system. All this is surrounded by walls constructed using the insulated concrete forms (ICF) that Warford says has kept their heating costs low, and in summer easily allows the couple to do without any air conditioning.

“When building this house, one of things we wanted was it to be energy efficient,” John says, and it was through the couple’s extensive research that they came across a local company, Smart Solutions Inc., of Kamiah, that matched their requirements for quality that provided a comfortable and economical living environment.

“Our customers are better salespeople than we are,” laughs Claudia King, owner of Smart Solutions.

Claudia comes from a construction family — her father was superintendent for Blake Construction in Georgetown, which among its projects worked on the FBI building there in Washington, D.C. – and it was in the 1990s when she took her interest in that industry and coupled it with promoting better and healthier building methods. That started with ICF — it’s not a new process, having emerged in Europe in the 1950s – that uses modular polystyrene blocks, which are stacked, reinforced with rebar and filled with concrete.

Proponents for this construction method highlight ease of assembly and structural strength versus traditional ‘stick-built’ homes, improved insulation value – “an R50-plus,” she says – fire protection, sound absorption and environmentally friendly.

“That was really the beginning of Smart Solutions,” she says



.Claudia started her company in 1998, and from there she built into her construction planning company's offerings the products and services that meet these basic requirements: "Everything we do is focused on energy efficiency and healthy living, and that these systems work in harmony with each other."

Her company has been involved with more than 100 building projects across the nation, among which include the new Theater, Fish and Game and Honda Dealership in Lewiston, and they have trained more than 200 contractors from the Grangeville area into McCall on the ICF construction method. If it goes into building construction, Claudia will likely have an energy efficient option at her fingertips whether ICF walls, windows to heating/cooling/ventilation systems, water filtration, vapor barriers and right down to the floor (and ceiling) insulation. Claudia works closely with engineer John Palecek of Kamiah – "He's got the technical knowledge, I've got more the heart of it," she jokes – on planning projects, which starts off first with determining the right products from the hype.

"John [Palecek] and I in the last 15 years have seen a lot of 'green washing' or green hype. It's hard for consumers to find out what's real and what's hype because everyone wants to get on the green bandwagon. What are the products that really make a difference for your home, and what are the fluff?" Confusing is rating systems meant to provide good comparisons for consumers are not always comparable, and they are vague or sometimes inapplicable when making determinations, for example on energy consumption and heating ability, according to Claudia. Green products can also be misused, she continues, noting one of her pet peeves: incorporated within building projects to secure government grant funding and not complemented with other energy-efficient systems and construction methods to create a truly green home or facility.

"For me it's not just about constructing homes," Claudia says, "it's about creating a healthy and energy-efficient home. Whatever we do, it has to have one of those main qualities." And with the economy as it has been the past several years, she adds, these options have become more attractive as "people are looking to build with more energy-efficient materials and things that last."

"What we try to do is keep a level of efficiency," John Palecek explains, planning building methods and components used well together maximize that energy efficiency, "so, for example, you don't do a wall with an R50 value with a window of R2." For those working on a budget, Claudia says they should start with ICF walls: "It's your largest gain, energy-efficiency wise."

"But," she adds, "you are going to pay for it whether you get it or not," in increased energy consumption due to inefficient construction materials. "So, when is your home going to pay you back?"

One factor to consider with these homes, Claudia says, is they're built pretty air-tight, so you want to have a healthy environment. For example the Warford's home, has the LifeBreath system that continually circulates fresh air into the home. Incorporated within that is a heat recovery ventilator – an air-to-air heat exchanger that essentially captures most of the heat before it expelled outside, which Palecek says is 90 percent efficient.

The healthy lifestyle component of Claudia's business is just a natural offshoot of her love of living in and enjoying the natural beauty of North Central Idaho, she says. As well, she's a people-person and enjoys that aspect of her career.

"Probably the best things about this business are the relationships," she says "You spend a lot of time with customers and you become very good friends."

It can be a lengthy process, Claudia explains, as she can spend a lot of time with some customers "sometimes years," she says, until they are finally ready to build. But the end result most often are good friendships, she says, that at the home and garden shows, for example, will find past clients visiting with them though the event ... and often times being a better salesperson for the products

through their enthusiastic satisfaction.

“When I consider the hours we’ve put into this business we’re probably not making much,” Claudia says, “but it’s something we really do enjoy.”

“It’s about building relationships not just about building homes,” she says.

Find out more on offerings through Claudia’s business online at

www.smartgreenbuild.com or call 208-798-4449.