

# The Small Business Report

## Spotlight Conversation

WITH **KEN KRANTZ**

Earl Daniels sat down with Ken Krantz for an indepth look at the company and the industry.

### Local concrete wall contractor provides a concrete choice to area homebuyers

Most homebuilders offer homebuyers upgrades such as granite countertops, ceramic tile, and stainless steel appliances. However, Ken Krantz, founder of Safewall® of North Florida, LLC, is taking upgrades to another level. Krantz' company is striking deals with area homebuilders to allow them to offer his company's product, Concrete Walls as a free upgrade. His company is expected to begin this month pouring concrete walls, or so-called cast-in-place concrete walls for new Northeast Florida homes. Krantz and his company have undergone many changes since October 1983 when he relocated his family and company from Michigan

to Jacksonville. Krantz recently discussed with *The Small Business Report* the company's history, and his most recent plans to revolutionize the way homes are built in the First Coast.

### SBR: Explain your circumstances leading up to moving your company and family from Michigan to Jacksonville over 20 years ago?

**Krantz:** During a visit to Jacksonville, I recall driving over the Buckman Bridge in October of 1983 looking at all the sailboats, and thinking to myself, 'what a beautiful part of Florida this is.' Having been a contractor in Michigan, I was thinking of relocating to the South. Michigan's economy was at a standstill. Most of the large automotive companies were having a rough time and everyday someone was

seemingly saying, 'Last one out of the state, please turn off the lights.' That evening, while in Jacksonville, I called my wife in Michigan and told her that I felt very comfortable in Jacksonville. Most of the people that I had met were extremely friendly. So, I said to her that we were going to move to Jacksonville. She asked me when. And I said, 'In two weeks.'

### SBR: What were you doing before you moved to Jacksonville?

**Krantz:** I was a contractor for 20 years in Bay City, Michigan, which is located 100 miles north of Detroit.

### SBR: When you moved to Jacksonville Safewall was not Safewall. Explain how Safewall was created?

**Krantz:** When I relocated here, the company was

Kenneth R. Krantz Co., a commercial concrete contracting company. The company did work for such clients as the U.S. Navy at Mayport, the Mayo Clinic, Flagler Hospital, and Universal Studios in Orlando. In February 2003, I read a newspaper article about Mercedes Homes building homes with concrete walls. The news article described how SWS, one of Mercedes' subsidiary companies, formed and poured two complete homes in one day. For several weeks I continually visited Whisper Creek Subdivision in Clay County where Mercedes was building cast-in-place concrete walls using aluminium forms. I became good friends with the people running SWS and thoroughly learned the pouring operation. I finally realized with the fluctuating lumber



prices, tropical termites, and Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the shift to cast-in-place concrete walls was only logical. And because of new hurricane requirements concrete walls can now competitively replace concrete block and wood-framed walls. The hurricane season of 2004 made homeowners keenly aware that poured concrete walls are becoming more of a necessity than an option.

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### Poured wall construction sequence

Day 1  
Place Wall  
Reinforcing



Reinforcing steel is anchored to the foundation.

Day 2  
Form and  
Pour Walls



Aluminum forms insure high quality construction.

Day 3  
Strip Forming from  
Poured Walls



High strength design mix concrete used in walls.

**SBR: Do you only pour concrete walls?**

**Krantz:** No. Cast-in-place concrete walls are what we mostly do. We are now including complete window packages and will add in the near future other services including foundations, truss systems, and framing. We primarily work through commercial contractors and residential builders. We also include complete engineering services when requested.

**SBR: Safewall's concept is a chip off Mercedes concrete method if you allow me to use half of a pun?**

**Krantz:** I give Mercedes all the credit for starting the trend towards poured in place concrete construction for homes. They made a commitment to convert all of their home construction to concrete over the next four or five-years. It is my understanding that

Mercedes builds over five thousands homes per year. That is a lot of volume. My motivation in getting into the Poured Concrete Wall business is not to pour walls for Mercedes, but to do them for all the other builders.

**SBR: How are you doing that?**

**Krantz:** Safewall is pitching incentives to homebuyers through local builders. The company is offering a free upgrade to homebuyers who choose to build a house with concrete walls instead of a wood-frame or concrete block construction. The upgrade is limited to Northeast Florida. Safewall expects do up to 100 new homes this year under this program. Homebuyers can select a preferred builder by visiting model houses in most developments in Northeast Florida. After the homebuyer

selects the builder, Safewall will work with that builder and install the poured-in-place concrete walls, at no additional cost. Safewall's unique program will encourage all builders to participate. This program is an excellent way for Safewall to launch their poured wall awareness program in Northeast Florida and have an end user, the new homeowner, get 100 percent of the benefits.

**SBR: Explain how Safewall installs walls?**

**Krantz:** The first thing we do is set all the reinforcing steel for the poured-in-place walls after the floor is poured. After we install the steel, County or City Building Officials inspect the installation. The next day, a crew of five to seven workers set the aluminium forms, and then pours concrete into the forms. The following day the workers

remove the aluminium forms and the home is now ready to set trusses.

**SBR: The concept seems so practical, why aren't there more companies like Safewall?**

**Krantz:** It is quite expensive to become a poured wall contractor. A block mason could go into business with a few thousand dollars per crew for equipment. However, the owner of a Cast-In-Place Concrete Company would have to shell out anywhere from \$500,000 to \$1 million for start-up costs.

**SBR: What are the benefits of using a concrete wall system?**

**Krantz:** The walls are termite and mold resistant, uniquely energy-efficient, disaster resistant, low maintenance, and most of all... **concrete walls do not leak** like concrete block or

wood frame walls do. The use of concrete walls to build houses is becoming more prevalent in the U.S. However, builders in other countries such as Europe, the Caribbean, and South America have poured concrete walls for decades.

**SBR: What kind of growth can you expect with Safewall?**

**Krantz:** Nearly every builder is interested in the poured wall concept. I don't like saying that we (Safewall) are going to do this or that. We plan on continually building crews to eventually complete 8-10 homes per day. I've always had a good reputation for doing quality work over the years; and plan on maintaining that standing.

*Additional information on safewall Companies and concrete poured walls visit [www.safewalls.com](http://www.safewalls.com)*

