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## News from the Neighbors

Mike & Paula R.  
*Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood (Indianapolis, IN)*

### Remodeler's Corner

by Lisa Floreancig  
*The Indianapolis Star* — Sunday, Real Estate

The Indianapolis housing market continues to rapidly grow, spreading further to the suburban areas. Many residents are staying closer to town in the older more established neighborhoods; preferring the older homes, mature trees, and community that comes with it. Many challenges come with trying to maintain the charm and feel of an older home while trying to upgrade it to today's standards.

Mike and Paula R. learned the hard way what they could and could not do on property restricted by the size of their lot and current zoning ordinances. Their Tudor-like brick home sits in the popular Meridian-Kessler neighborhood. Because of a growing family, cramped kitchen, and a dilapidated garage, the couple decided the time to expand and remodel was sooner rather than later.

The one-and-a-half story, three-bedroom, two-bath home was without a master bedroom suite, cramping the couple and two of their children into the two bedrooms upstairs. The baby's room was down on the main level. "I wasn't comfortable with us upstairs and the baby downstairs," said Paula. "Running downstairs at night wasn't fun, either."

Their first move was to hire an architectural firm. What seemed like a logical initial step soon became a nightmare to them. "It became apparent right away that the plans weren't going to work because of zoning issues," said Paula. "All the time and money we spent with the company was for nothing. They obviously didn't do their homework."

With the scrapped plans in hand, the couple, feeling a little burned and a lot frustrated, regrouped and came up with a new strategy, go directly to a builder. Sketches and quotes from three builders, however, didn't alleviate the rough emotions experienced by the couple. They said the plans were way off the mark.

"Meridian-Kessler is kind of land locked, but we did have an extra side yard and a large old maple tree we wanted to keep. The builders we talked to all wanted to take that space and build out," explained Mike.

Until the couple met Joe Stilwell, president of Stilwell LLC, Architectural Design & Custom Remodeling.

Stilwell met with the couple, listened to what they wanted, explained the design process and began working to



before



after

meet their needs for the home. Very shortly they had design plans and specifications that laid out a more vertical expansion instead of a horizontal one. "Joe came back, and literally with his first shot, was pretty much dead-on with what we wanted," said Mike. "He was quick to return phone calls and very responsive. It was really refreshing and a nice change of pace from what we had just gone through."

Now the project was finally coming to life. "Basically, I started over," said Stilwell. "We needed to find a very creative way to meet their needs within the parameters of the property we had to work with. Not only did we need to add onto the existing house for the new master bedroom suite and garage, we needed to redesign the existing areas to create the new kitchen, and help the traffic flow in the existing house."

"That's the beauty of our design/build process and a real benefit to our customers," Stilwell explained. "Ultimately our end goal is to build the project for our customer. Having the design and construction under one roof, the process is smoother, and the lines of communication and responsibility are very clear. Remodeling is a very challenging process; we want the end product to be a benefit to the family, the property, and the neighborhood."

The long, narrow kitchen with more wasted than useable space was transformed when Stilwell removed the wall between the galley-style kitchen and small den, resulting in a more open concept design. The new master bedroom/bath suite boasts a reading area, his-and-her walk-in closets, garden tub, double sinks, large separate shower, and plenty of room for family time. "The master suite is a large, open room with lots of space," said Paula. "We go up there about 7:00 in the evening and stay there. We just lay there and play games or watch ballgames."

Five months after Stilwell began the actual remodeling process, the project was completed to the delight of the family.

"We considered moving when we first started talking about what we needed, but you don't get the quality," said Mike. "We knew if we moved into a newer home we would still put money into the moving, decorating, landscaping, and remodeling the areas we wanted to improve; so we decided to take that money and put it into something we already call 'home.' We are really pleased."

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