

## newHOMES

## HOMEFRONT

## Like father, like son — building a family tradition



SHEILA BRADY

Tristan Terkuc is a big, strapping man with sunburnt skin and a driving ambition to make a living building a handful of homes every year. It's not going to be easy, warns his father and business partner, Vic Terkuc.

The industry is complicated and it takes lots of money

to buy land, pay for servicing and wind through all the needed municipal and provincial approvals, says the senior Terkuc. He should know.

Back in 1970 he also worked with his father, Mike, and launched Star Quality Homes and then Shellstar Holdings. The two built homes in a string of small communities surrounding Ottawa, including North Gower, Richmond and Stittsville.

In the past two decades, Vic Terkuc has seen booms, busts and built close to 500 homes. He anticipated the crash in the early '90s and decided to take a break in '93, instead of losing money in a weak economy.

The economy has bounced back and now 24-year-old Tristan Terkuc wants to put Shellstar Holdings back in the housing game — slowly and carefully.

"I'm happy as a clam on the building site," says the large man, who has an easy smile and fingers yellowed from smoking half a pack of cigarettes a day.

The oldest son of Vic and Judy Terkuc swept down building sites and swung hammers when he was a teenager. His younger brother, Jayson, also helped, but he doesn't want to go into building. A sister, Shelly, 20, hasn't made up her career mind.

Today, Tristan is overseeing construction of a two-storey model home on Amy Street in Stittsville and is the sales manager meeting potential buyers in a completed bungalow next door. Father and son recently bought eight large lots on Amy Street.

Last year the two men built three homes and sold one. In '97 they built and sold two homes.

Tristan Terkuc represents the backbone of the Ontario home building industry, an industry where 60 per cent of the province's 5,370 builders complete three homes or less a year.

This is the same industry where there are few big builders rivaling Ottawa's Minto or Toronto's Greenpark Homes, yet these large builders scoop up the lion's share of all new home sales.

"I'm not going to take the market by storm," says the young builder who loves driving down James Lewis Avenue in the family's largest community of Amberway in Stittsville.

During a recent summery evening drive, there were young men washing cars and children playing on front lawns in the neighbourhood of 160 homes that Vic Terkuc built between 1986 and 1990.

"I want to focus on the quality of the house. I just want to say that I want to be a good builder," says Tristan. "I want to make a living,

support my family, not be a billionaire because that's a lot of zeros," says the man who is looking forward to an October wedding date with 25-year-old fiancée Kelly Reynolds.

Right now, Tristan is learning, watching his father and a draftsman design homes with lots of windows, lots of closet space and big front porches. He is on the job site by 6:30 most mornings, staying until late, overseeing the trades and deliveries. There are many long days.

"I've got a lot of proving to do," says the young builder who listens closely when his father warns it's best to have one successful project at a time, because it's impossible to keep an eye on two, three and four sites.

"It's also better to be conservative, get your financing into gear and expand gradually," says the younger Terkuc, who left university because he missed the building site.

"A lot of builders expand too quickly and then they go broke."

Vic Terkuc's building formula has earned him a top rating from the Ontario New Home Warranty Program for After-Sales Service and praise from buyers seven years later.

In 1992, Stan and Johanne Janas were looking to move from their Barrhaven townhouse to a single home. They liked Stittsville and found lots were large and prices affordable. The couple happened upon Vic Terkuc in the Stittsville community of Fernbank Estates and were pleased, but uncertain when he said he could have their three-bedroom home finished in nine weeks.

"I could not believe his project management skills," says Mr. Janas, a human resources manager at a local high-tech company. "He finished the home in 8 1/2 weeks. It was phenomenal. He also made changes to the plan and if there was a problem, I had his home number."

"There was a large personal trust factor," says Mr. Janas. "He also talked us out of doing trendy things, like using black marble around the fireplace. He made us stop and think."

Two doors away, Wendy and Mark Wilson decided to buy a Shellstar home after they helped the Janases move into their home. "We saw the house, liked it and liked Stittsville," says Wendy Wilson, a data manager, who grew up in Smiths Falls and likes small communities.

"When we bought our last house, there were two pages of deficiencies at the end of the first year," says the mother of two. "With Shellstar, there were only a couple of things."

The Wilsons bought a four-bedroom home and once again, Shellstar finished the home in nine weeks, well ahead of the industry norm of three months. "I liked the workmanship and if Vic said he would do something he always carried through."

Tristan knows he has big shoes to fill, but he's going to get the job, one house at a time.

Sheila Brady is the Citizen Homes Editor. Read previous Homefront columns at [www.ottawacitizen.com](http://www.ottawacitizen.com)



ROD MACIVOR, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Vic Terkuc and 24-year-old Tristan Terkuc are the second and third generation in a home building family under the banner of Shellstar Holdings.