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By Matt Alderton

Ontario contractor Ken Vincent spends most days climbing ladders, reading tape measures, working table saws and hanging drywall. At least a few days a year, he leaves the jobsite for an unlikely destination: a courtroom.

"Anybody with a skill saw and a half-ton truck can call themselves a contractor," says Vincent, 47, who frequently serves as an expert witness in construction litigation cases against contractors for poor quality. "It's unfortunate, because clients are getting such bad work done. They're getting ripped off and it's heartbreaking to see. That's why my passion now is to clean the industry up."

Vincent carries that mission when it comes to running his company, Mountview Construction Management and Consulting in Newmarket, Ont, which prides itself on the kind of customer service and craftsmanship that Vincent champions in court. Honesty is the biggest part of the business, Vincent says. "All of our work comes from word of mouth," says Vincent who gets at least two or three referrals every month. "We get our clients from our reputation and the work that we do. As a business owner, that makes me feel pretty proud."

Plumb Perfect

For as long as he can remember, Vincent has been in love with his profession. "I've always had some kind of tool in my hand," Vincent says. His early projects included building bike ramps, Kool-Aid stands and a gate for his grandfather's backyard when he was 10 years old. "My grandfather still has pictures of me standing there in front of the finished gate," Vincent says.

At 20 years old, Vincent turned that hobby into a vocation when he became a plumber, specializing in service for residential and high-rise buildings for about five years. From plumbing, Vincent went into commercial construction as director of construction for ClubLink Corp., Canada's largest owner and operator of golf clubs and resorts. "I'd always had a passion for carpentry, so I decided to switch things up," says Vincent, who's entirely self-taught. "If you keep your eyes and ears open in this industry you can learn a lot. Even as a plumber, you're picking up what the electrician's doing and what the HVAC guy is doing."

During his five years with ClubLink Corp, Vincent built and remodeled some of the company's 32 clubhouses on high-end golf courses including places like: RattleSnake Point Golf Club in Milton, Ont., Rocky Crest Golf Resort in Muskoka, Ont. and King's Riding Golf Club in Aurora, Ont. After that, Vincent became a construction consultant for two custom homebuilders as well as a senior project manager at Heather & Little, which specializes in custom architectural sheet metal and historical restoration; and manager of the construction division at Normerica Post & Beam, which builds timber frame houses in Ontario and Colorado.

Then in 2007, Vincent decided to go out on his own and start his own business, Mountview Construction Management and Consulting. "I wanted to do things my way, so I figured my best bet was to do it myself and see if I was right or wrong," Vincent says. Six years later, Vincent says he knows it was the right decision. "I've proved to myself that I can do things the way I want to do them and be successful," he says.

A Family Affair

Vincent started his business with mostly basement and bathroom remodels. Since then, he's expanded into kitchens, decks, outdoor structures and landscaping, and now specializes in large-scale renovations, restorations and additions. "Because of the recession, people aren't building as many new custom homes," Vincent says. "A lot of people have decided to stay where they are and remodel. That's become pretty lucrative for us."

Vincent built a strong reputation for a high-end remodeling business with his industry knowledge, attention to detail and a strong support team. "When you have 50 or 60 men on a commercial job site, you have to be on top of all the details," Vincent says. "When you transfer that, it makes smaller-scale residential work really easy to do."

Besides Vincent's work crew, which typically includes eight men, he's teamed up with his wife, who handles Mountview Construction's bookkeeping and offers interior design consultations. Over the years, their three sons have also spent timing working in the business. "It's nice that the whole family's involved," he says.

Over the Top Service

Just like his wife, sons and work crew, Vincent says he considers the Lowe's store in East Gwillimbury, Ont., part of his essential team and a member of the family. "Lowe's came to East Gwillimbury five years ago," he says. "I shopped there a few times and made some small orders, just trying out the store. It turned out they had a wider variety of materials [than other stores] and their service was just over the top."

Based on his early experiences with the store, Vincent says he eventually made Lowe's of East Gwillimbury his go-to resource for materials and supplies, and good customer service. "I met Ken in the aisle," says Commercial Sales Specialist Amanda "Mandy" Waugh. "When I found out he was a contractor I introduced him to what we can offer commercially and how it could save him money. It just steamrolled from there."

Even though it's a little bit of a drive, Vincent, who is an ardent fisherman in his spare time, says he'll make the trek to Lowe's after seeing Waugh's stellar customer service and wide selection. "What I've said to him is 'We might be a 20-minute drive the opposite way to place a big order, but for every time you step on the gas to save money with us, that's more in your fishing fund,'" Waugh says. That's when Vincent told Waugh, "I never thought of it that way. You hooked me." "Hook, line and sinker," Waugh recalls saying.

In fact, Vincent jokes he has been "hooked" time and again, since he can special order hard-to-source materials from Lowe's. Also, the commercial services desk personally calls him to give him details about an upcoming sale on drywall. Most recently, Vincent enrolled in the Lowe's national buying program, which gives him discounts on everyday items in exchange for making a minimum annual purchase. "For me, that's fantastic because a lot of times you place a big order, then you also need another \$10,000 worth of small stuff to finish the job," Vincent says. "The national buying program gives you some big discounts on the small stuff, which really adds up. I'm able to pass those savings right back to my clients."

For Vincent, that will likely be a long time. "I don't need to retire and I don't want to retire," Vincent says. "I just want to keep doing this, keep making clients happy and keep on fulfilling dreams."

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