

## 'A victory for common sense'

A small builder from Embrun trumps the big players, taking home the People's Choice Award

### Sheila Brady

The Ottawa Citizen

*Saturday, October 27, 2007*

John Corvinelli is pumped, talking faster than a speeding construction truck and riding high after winning the People's Choice Award at last Saturday's Housing Design Awards.

"This is all about David and Goliath," says the second-generation builder, who visited his father's east-end work sites when he was a toddler 40 years ago.

In this modern scenario, the father of two girls is David, swinging a hammer, and Goliath is the housing industry -- from highly trained architects to established builders and kitchen designers who competed in 27 diverse categories for honours.

The People's Choice Award is sponsored by the Citizen and the winner is decided by visitors to the Capital Fall Home Show, which took over Lansdowne Park in September. All of the entries from this year's awards finalists -- from fancy glass homes to modern pads in Rockcliffe Park -- were on display at the show. Several hundred visitors voted for their favourite.

In the past, votes usually went to big or dramatic houses -- nothing at all like the places 99.9 per cent of us call home.

But this year the people gravitated to Corvinelli and a solid two-bedroom brick bungalow he built on a big lot in Embrun. "Maybe people related to it and maybe couldn't relate to a 7,000- or a 10,000-square-foot home they could never afford to live in or to buy," he theorizes.

For the record, the Embrun bungalow, designed for a retired racing car driver, has a triple garage to hold cars and snowmobiles, two bedrooms, an impressive kitchen, a breakfast area that does double duty as a dining room, and a price tag of \$375,000. There are high, recessed ceilings, hardwood



CREDIT: Rod MacIvor, The Ottawa Citizen

John Corvinelli designs and builds about eight homes a year, but the second-generation builder walked away with the coveted People's Choice Award last weekend for a thoughtful two-bedroom bungalow set on a big lot in the east-end community of Embrun.

or \$6 a day to heat and cool, mostly because it exceeds Energy Star ratings.

"It was a victory for common sense and a good use of space," says Corvinelli, who has been in and out of the housing industry since 1967. At first he helped his father Tony, owner of Solidex Holdings, a small firm that has built homes in Orléans and the smaller Eastern Ontario communities of Embrun and Russell.

"I think I was four years old when I first walked on to a site," says Corvinelli, 44, who learned construction from the ground up, then earned a diploma from Algonquin College as an architectural technologist.

He launched Corvinelli Homes in 1984, but retreated when the housing industry slowed in 1989, opting instead to run a hardware and lumberyard in Limoges for 11 years.

He returned to housing in 2001, armed with a refined list of top products and a commitment to building green and Energy Star homes. "It costs an additional \$6,000 to \$7,500 to build an Energy Star home. To me, it doesn't make any sense in my books not to do it."

"John is quite a character. He is enthusiastic and full of energy and quite a good builder," says Ross Elliott, energy evaluator of Homesol Building Solutions who tests Corvinelli's homes and hundreds of others in the city. "He passed the Energy Star ratings with flying colours.

"This is great for small builders. It's good to see the little guys get some recognition. Perhaps the days of monster homes are numbered because they are not as intimate or as comfortable as a smaller home. John's homes are really homey. They are nice and comfortable."

Typically, Corvinelli designs and builds eight homes a year, ranging from modest bungalows to a 4,000-square-foot home now under construction in Limoges. "I am the sales manager and designer," says Corvinelli, who relies on his wife Trudy to handle the books and accounting.

In many ways, Corvinelli

is typical of the average builder in Ontario. While big builders make most of the sales, small family-owned companies account for the largest chunk of the industry, typically building 15 or fewer homes a year.

"When people come in to talk, they are not talking to a sales person, but to the builder. I am here from 6:30 in the morning to 6:30 at night and I love it."

Corvinelli also took home an award in the category for a single home under 2,000 square feet, facing off against highly acclaimed architect Barry Hobin and the team from 2H Interior Design. The judging panel declared a tie between Hobin's romantic farmhouse in Merrickville and Corvinelli's stone Embrun bungalow.

Sheila Brady is the Citizen's Homes editor. Reach her at [sbrady@thecitizen.canwest.com](mailto:sbrady@thecitizen.canwest.com).

## MORE ON JOHN CORVINELLI HOMES

John Corvinelli and his father Tony Corvinelli are building homes in the Russell community of Solidex Place. There are 43 lots and 10 homes under construction, including a Solidex model home that is almost completed. John Corvinelli is starting a new model home next week, although he does have a sales trailer.

Directions: Take Hwy. 417 east to Boundary Road South into Russell, turn left onto Concession and left onto Craig Street.

More information: Visit [www.corvinellihomes.ca](http://www.corvinellihomes.ca) or phone 613-223-9328.