

Remodeling

Give

'Em a Niche

Specializing in a product or service can give your company a competitive advantage. Here are five success stories about remodelers who found and developed a niche.

JIM CORY SENIOR EDITOR

A MATTER OF COMMITMENT

Sometimes finding a niche is a matter of recognizing an opportunity and being willing to commit the resources to take advantage of it. Craig Smyth, owner of Clemleddy Construction in Hawley, Pa., refuses to consider himself any kind of genius for the niche business he's built converting vacation residences to primary homes in the lakes area of Pennsylvania's Pocono mountains. "It wasn't like a light bulb went off in my head," he explains. "It just sort of happened."

Smyth arrived in the Poconos in 1986 and set himself up as a framing contractor, subbing for developers building cabins. After the home building surge faded, he recognized a whole-house remodeling market in the making as older baby boomers and those approaching retirement began buying up the A-frames, saltboxes, and mini-chalets with the intention of converting them to year-round residences. Who would know how to do that better than the person who built them?

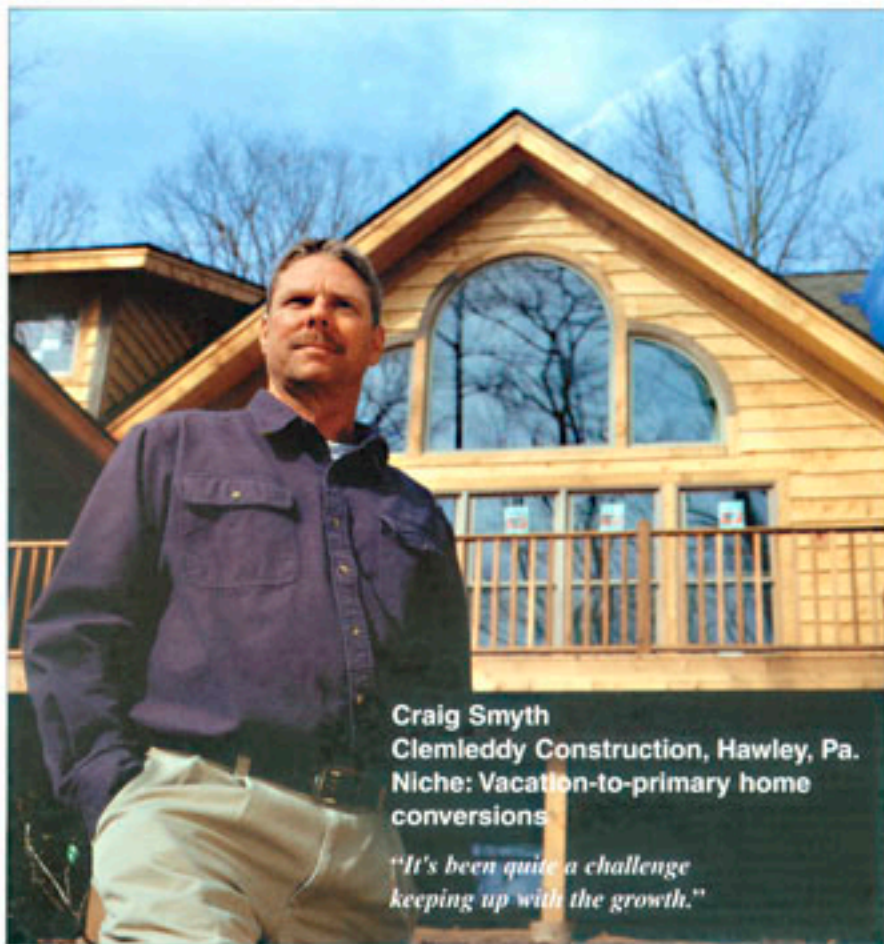
Smyth's company now specializes in taking those 1,200- and 1,500-square-foot homes — electric heat, no garage, galley kitchens, and inadequate insulation — and adding space and upgrading mechanicals. He converts the electric heat to forced hot air and changes out the 100-amp electrical service and installs 200-amp. He puts in new siding, new windows, and new kitchens.

Word of mouth and the company's Web site (www.clemleddyconstruction.com) spur leads. Demand has increased to the point where Smyth can pick and choose projects;

In 2000, his company did 64. Last year more than half of the 22 projects he did were whole-house conversions averaging between \$180,000 and \$200,000.

Since specializing in vacation-to-primary conversions, Smyth's company is more prof-

itable. "It's been quite a challenge keeping up with the growth," he says. But the reason he's the first choice for many consumers who want a whole-house conversion is that his company, one of the largest in the area, is big enough to do the entire job.



Craig Smyth
Clemleddy Construction, Hawley, Pa.
Niche: Vacation-to-primary home conversions

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Photo: Tom Wolff