



***Pam Sessions, CEO  
Hedgewood Properties***

### ***Creating Homes That Make a Difference***

“Artfully designed and skillfully crafted” – that’s the mark of a Pam Sessions home. For over fifteen years, her company, Hedgewood Properties, has been successfully designing, building and selling quality homes in the Atlanta area. But there’s a new spring in Pam’s step, a new vision in her mind’s eye and she’s happy to share it with others because she knows she’s making a difference .

Before getting too far ahead, however, it’s worthwhile to follow Pam’s story from the beginning. After all, how many little girls grow up dreaming of becoming home builders? Not too many it seems and that includes Pam.

#### ***Early impact***

Ms Sessions actually grew up in Atlanta – by way of Birmingham, Alabama, and a short stint in Pennsylvania. Hers was a traditional family that included two brothers. One of Pam’s most memorable times growing up occurred in the seventh grade when she became aware of how much she loved to learn and how driven she could be. Her English teacher had started a class called IMPACT and Pam wanted “in.” She was a fairly typical student, popular and a cheerleader, and wasn’t at all certain that she would be accepted. Nonetheless, Pam worked hard to make it and she did. It was great, she said, because it provided her with access to more creative learning.

It was in her IMPACT class that Pam’s love affair with the west began. She knew she wanted to explore the western U.S. and see places like Pike’s Peak. And at 18, as a summer counselor at a YMCA outpost she got the opportunity. Something else important happened about that time - she began dating a guy named Don Donnelly. They even worked out west together. Who knew that one day Pam and Don would build houses together as husband and wife? The signs were there if you knew how to read them, since Pam admitted that they used to “walk houses” together in high school.

After high school, Pam attended Georgia State University where her interest in photography, and subsequently in art, was further developed. Later, when she graduated from the University of Georgia, a wonderful opportunity presented itself for Pam to move to Berkeley, CA where she worked for a colleague of the famous landscape photographer, Ansel Adams. What a terrific experience – working as a writer and photographer – even spending time in the great outdoors on nature preserves.

#### ***Designing turn***

Returning to Atlanta, Pam’s life was about to take a defining turn. She married her high school sweetheart after he graduated from Georgia Tech and had begun his career as a project manager

and a builder. Pam listened and learned about the business of construction. When some friends mentioned they needed a house to rent, Pam decided she'd try her hand at building. It was 1985 and at age 28 she bought a two acre tract and built not one, but two houses on it. She even worked in partnership with her mother-in-law.

Pam had found a new career that combined building and art. She clearly credits her husband and the many sub-contractors with whom she worked with valuable coaching in the early days. She says about the experience, "It was actually easy. I didn't have an ego because I believed everyone knew more than I did. I was frugal but fair with the sub-contractors, I communicated, I listened, and they gave me positive feedback."

"At the time," Pam continued, "I really didn't know I was doing anything different from other builders. I just knew the real estate agents liked me and so did their clients. The buyers were not used to being listened to and I think my working with them, designing what they wanted, really made the difference." That difference turned into steady growth for Pam's company, which had now become Hedgewood Properties. After four and a half years, Pam's husband decided to come on board as well. Hedgewood Properties became a family affair.

### ***A full life***

Today, the highly successful working couple have two children, a boy and a girl 21 months apart. For the past six years, Pam has had a live-in nanny, but she relishes her role as a mother and parent and values their family time. Fortunately, the days of having to work seven days a week from dark to dark are over.

Still, running a business that includes sixty-five employees isn't easy – especially one that includes five separate companies - real estate, interior design, mortgage, land development, and building. Each company is a stand-alone, overseen by Pam and her husband, but having its own president.

As a leader, Ms. Sessions thinks having different perspectives is truly an advantage. Three of her five company presidents are women. "It's just the way it is," she said, "and each person brings special talent to the table." When it comes to other expertise, Pam hires what she needs, e.g., a chief financial officer. She also believes that people grow in their roles and she tries to provide the environment for that to happen in her thriving business.

Providing a good team environment for her business associates is not all Pam thinks about. She is totally committed to environmentally responsible development – a process called "greenbuilding." Recently she passed the gavel as president of the Georgia Home Builders' Association, but not before the association made significant progress in their commitment to build a better, more sustainable, and pollution-safe way.

### ***Environmental passion***

Pam has also served on the Georgia Governor's Greenspace Committee helping to draft appropriate environmental legislation. In 1999 Pam got involved in launching the Earthcraft House which has become a centerpiece of her own company's product line. As a part of this project, and a member of the not for profit organization known as Southface Energy, Pam and other builders have been trained to do the right thing.

"Forty percent of our air pollution we breathe comes from inside buildings and we're doing something about it," she says. As a result, almost one hundred builders have been trained to date in the EarthCraft House principles. Pam also travels around the country to speak to groups like

the National Association of Realtors to share the Georgia story and the message of how to provide better indoor air quality, reduce energy consumption, and reduce pollution.

When she's not crusading for greenbuilding, Pam is involved in her community at large – on the school council where her children attend public school and on her local Chamber of Commerce board. For fun and relaxation, Pam pursues music and is a member of a band called the “Shrink Rap.” They practice faithfully every week, Pam says, and occasionally play a “gig.”

But make no mistake, Pam's first love - besides her family - is her work which has turned more and more to building in historic neighborhoods and ensuring that both history and community are preserved. Her eyes light up when she speaks of the “magic” that she feels when she can work on a projects that bring out the best in people and their ideas. That she totally embraces the best ideas and the difference in perspective from a variety of people is clear. What's also clear is that Pam Sessions is a woman who loves what she does and the difference she can make in the world around her. Her latest big project starts in 2002 when her company will develop an entire village where people will live, work, and play in an environmentally planned community. Who knows after that.

October, 2001

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