

THE BUILDER'S JOURNAL

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A man in a dark suit, blue shirt, and light blue tie is smiling and leaning on a white staircase railing. The background shows a well-lit dining room with a chandelier and a window with blinds.

Richard Merlini

American Heartland
Building Quality & Value



A three-side fireplace in stone brings warmth and drama to this elegant great room. Photograph © Carlson Productions, LLC.

American Heartland *Building Quality & Value*

By Jim Akans

A new home is the pinnacle of the American Dream. Embracing the pride and aspirations of the home buyer, embarking on a new home project can be both exhilarating and intimidating. With over seventeen years of expertise creating carefully designed and crafted residences in the Southeastern Michigan area, Ameri-

can Heartland understands the needs and desires of the new home buyer and is passionate about making their customers building experience a satisfying and rewarding one.

“We are not the largest company in the marketplace, and we are not the smallest,” states Richard Merlini, Owner and President of American

Heartland. “So while we are sizable enough to offer our customers the value we can achieve with our buying power, we are also able to offer personalized service that isn’t available from a large, national building organization. We care about what we do, and we care about each customer who chooses our company to build



This popular two-story design in *Decora Park* features a wonderful front façade highlighted by a covered front porch. Photograph © Centennial Publications, Inc.

their new residence. We are here to build relationships with our customers, to become partners in creating their dream home.”

Currently, American Heartland has two premier communities underway that reflect the extraordinary care the company takes in the planning, design and construction of their homes and neighborhoods. *Riverside Communities*, located on North Avenue between 21 Mile and 23 Mile Roads, features 133 home sites with design plans and community amenities tailored to the young professional and empty-nester.

Richard Merlini states, “While many of the sites at *Riverside Communities* feature detached condominiums, we made a decision to take care of all of the exterior maintenance for our residents. They can enjoy a carefree lifestyle that is typically only found in communities with multi-unit attached condominiums. We offer very luxurious interior amenities, and the community has a beautiful Clubhouse

with a swimming pool, open park areas, and nature preserve. With the Clinton River running behind the property, *Riverside Communities* is a relaxing and scenic place to live.”

A second flagship community just underway is *Decora Park*, located off 26 Mile Road just east of New Haven

Road. The neighborhood features site condominiums, with designs reflecting a Neo-Traditional style reminiscent of mid 20th century American architecture. During the development of *Decora Park*, American Heartland worked closely with the New Haven school district and donated a ten acre parcel to be utilized for the construction of a new, state-of-the-art elementary school.

Richard Merlini notes, “So children can walk or ride their bikes to school because it is located in the center of their neighborhood. While our designs are Neo-Traditional, we did not include back alleyways that are prevalent in many Neo-Traditional communities today because we felt families would prefer having a full back yard. We did include expansive front porches, and moved the homes a little closer to the street, so there is a sense of community in *Decora Park*. We also included open park areas, streetscaping, and front sidewalks for residents to enjoy.”

The family-oriented theme found in many American Heartland communities is a reflection of the atmosphere of the organization itself. With over 17 years of homebuilding experience, the American Heartland team is comprised of many long-term employees,

This home design offer at *Decora Park* is reminiscent of mid 20th Century American architecture. *Decora Park's* family-oriented neighborhood is enhanced by a new state-of-the-art elementary school located in the center of the community. Photograph © Centennial Publications, Inc.





Granite countertops and stainless steel appliances offer luxury and utility in this gorgeous kitchen space. Photograph © Carlson Productions, LLC.

vendors, and subcontractors. The dedication and commitment of this team offers customers a consistent continuity in workmanship and expertise in building their new home. These relationships are one of the keys to the company's many years of success, and the leadership at American Heartland understand that their employees, vendors and trades are at the core of the company's performance in the eyes of their customers.

"We are highly selective in choosing our employees, vendors and subcontractors," notes Richard Merlini. "Ul-

timately, they are the ones who perform the work on the individual homes. While we set the standards they build our homes by, they must attain those standards. We enjoy a significant amount of referral business, and it isn't unusual for us to build homes for several generations of the same family. We have customers come back to build their second or third home with us, and they are pleasantly surprised to find they are working with the same staff they worked with on their previous home. We are a family organization, and

want our customer to feel they are a part of our family.'

As American business moves in the direction toward larger, nationally-based companies in the 21st century, the character of homebuilding in Southeastern Michigan is also changing. Richard Merlini notes that, in some ways, the influence of national building companies has had a positive effect on local building, in that it has raised the bar within the industry to a new level of professionalism, particularly in the areas of customer service and satisfaction.



Interesting architectural features, such as the stepped ceiling and lighted wall alcove, add dimension to this formal dining room. Photograph © Carlson Productions, LLC.

He states, “Ultimately that benefits the customer. It is vital to have satisfied customers and a service department that take care of the needs of the homeowner. Designs must have a sense of purpose and flow, and everyone on staff, from the sales representatives to field personnel, need to have a professional attitude and take pride in their work.”

Richard continues, “As local builders, we have an advantage in that we can respond more quickly to changes in the marketplace. At American Heartland, we consistently offer cut-

ting-edge products and design to our customers. We continually train our staff, with monthly seminars for our field superintendents on the latest products, methods and homebuilding techniques, and our sales staff regularly attend training sessions. The home buyer is changing in that they are much more knowledgeable in what they expect in a new home. We believe in meeting and exceeding those expectations.”

American Heartland stands firmly behind their work by offering a two-year warranty on their homes, with

an unprecedented additional eight-year warranty covered by a warranty service corporation. The company’s in-house service department is extremely pro-active in making certain each homeowner is fully satisfied with their investment. A service representative contacts the homeowner at 90 days and one-year intervals after moving into their new home, and walks through the residence to ensure there are no problems or concerns.

While American Heartland is not a fully custom building company, they do offer over 300 choices to their custom-

ers to create a personalized, semi-custom residence. The company's new design center on Hall Road in Macomb provides home buyers with a central location to browse through the extensive options and upgrades, and take advantage of the seasoned advice of the American Heartland design staff in creating a one-of-a-kind theme for their new home.

The term American Heartland embodies the essence of the Midwest living experience. Integrity, honesty, value and ingenuity are among the fundamental characteristics inherent in personality of the region, and they are reflected in the objectives of the American Heartland team. Richard Merlini states, "Our customers demand quality and value in their new home, and we know that we must constantly evolve with the needs of the marketplace because knowledge is king today. We watch market trends and developments very carefully so we understand what our customers are looking for in a new home. By ser-



The stylish townhomes at *Heritage Commons* line a scenic park area that adjoins trails and a protected nature preserve. Photograph © Centennial Publications, Inc..

vic-ing our customers well, and offering the latest products, designs and building techniques, we know they will be as happy with their home twenty years from now as they are when they first moved in. Our job is to do everything we possibly can to make our customer's building expe-

rience an enjoyable and fulfilling one."

The Builder's Journal is proud to present American Heartland as our spotlight in this month's issue. For further information, call (586) 948-1800 or visit their web site at www.ah-homes.com.
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The innovative design standards of American Heartland range from traditional to unconventional, such as this fascinating Colonial home located in *Spring Arbor*. Richard Merlini states, "By servicing our customers well, and offering the latest products, designs and building techniques, we know they will be as happy with their home twenty years from now as they are when they first move in." Photograph © Centennial Publications, Inc.

