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WHO BUILD NORTH AMERICA

# CONSTRUCTION

TODAY

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# EASY LIVING

EPCON PROVIDES LIFESTAGE BUYERS WITH  
A COMFORTABLE LIFESTYLE. → p.157



» Epcon says the design of its products is a major point of differentiation for the company.

# Easy Living

EPCON PROVIDES LIFESTAGE BUYERS WITH A COMFORTABLE LIFESTYLE. BY ALAN DORICH

When their children leave home, parents might find themselves looking for a smaller living space. Epcon has provided homebuyers with those spaces for 30 years, Vice President of Franchising Tim Rini says.

Based in Dublin, Ohio, Epcon builds homes and neighborhoods that are popular with homebuyers who are age 55 or older. Founders Ed Bacome and Phil Fankhauser started the company in 1986 and built their first condominium community in Columbus, Ohio.

"It was extremely unique," Rini says, explaining that the development consisted of ranch condominiums that were arranged in a pinwheel design that placed a unit in every corner of the building. "Each

unique residence also had its own private entrance, which made it feel more like a single-family home."

The design became popular in Columbus, and Bacome and Fankhauser began to

license it to other developers. Eventually, the two discovered that the unique concept had great appeal with empty nesters and baby boomers.

In 2007, Epcon diverged from its previous model with a new design, Rini says. "They introduced detached condominiums that literally are single-family, freestanding homes," he says. "There's no shared wall between them.

"Those freestanding homes have overtaken what is recognized as a typical Epcon home and our product has evolved," he says, noting that it developed the product through market research. "[We used] a very specific survey of 55-plus buyers to make sure the program that was given to the architect was spot on with the customers we were going after."

## *Epcon Communities Franchising, Inc.*

[www.epconfranchising.com](http://www.epconfranchising.com)

[www.epconcommunities.com](http://www.epconcommunities.com)

- **2015 sales:** 1,140 Homes Closed, Avg. Sales Price: \$303,500
  - **Headquarters:** Dublin, Ohio
  - **Employees:** 95 full-time employees
  - **Specialty:** Homebuilding
- "I've changed peoples' lives."*  
 — Tim Rini, vice president of franchising

Today, as Epcon celebrates its 30th anniversary, the company builds in 18 states and continues to see demand for senior living projects. "There's a huge need for 55-plus housing everywhere in the country, now with the baby boomer silver tsunami coming through the American demographics," he says.

Epcon expects to close more than 1,400 homes this year, Rini adds. *Builder* magazine also recently named it the 40th largest homebuilder in the United States. "That's a significant achievement for any builder," he says.

But what has made it more satisfying is that Epcon has reached that milestone while specializing in two-bedroom ranch condominiums and freestanding homes, Rini says. "It's amazing and commendable that we are as large and as successful as we are," he states.

### Delivering a Lifestyle

Epcon's potential customer base grows on a daily basis, Rini says. "Every day in the United States, 10,000 people turn 65," he says, noting that these consumers are looking for new homes where they can age in place and enjoy life to the fullest.

"There's a lot of pent-up demand within our typical buyer segment," he says. "For everyone living in an Epcon community, the main thing we offer is lifestyle."

Epcon helps deliver that lifestyle by providing landscaping, snow removal and lawn care services, Rini says. "One of our mottos is 'no steps and no mower,'" he says.

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"The 55-plus and the 65-plus people have reached the point in their lives where they're ready to lock their homes and leave," he says. "They don't want to come home and have a bunch of chores to do. They're most interested in going out with their friends, traveling or entertaining in their new home."

### On the Cutting-Edge

Rini joined Epcon in 2007 and credits its success to its product design. "Epcon has always remained on the cutting-edge of residential design," he says.

"That is easily recognized in the consumer market," he continues. "It's also very readily recognized by our Franchise Builders who appreciate and want to take advantage of our good designs."

He also praises Epcon's operating systems, which have been well honed for a franchise to easily adopt. "They can very quickly get into the 55-plus market with proven home designs."

Epcon provides prototype plans that make it easy for Franchise Builders to adapt to local codes. "We also provide contracts and scopes of work for the trade partners to use," he says, noting that the company also provides marketing resources.

However, "There are different market nuances regionally everywhere," he notes. "We recognize that marketing that works in the Northeast is not necessarily going to work in the Southwest."

This guidance, Rini notes, allows a franchise to come into a market and start selling homes immediately. "We also provide guidance on zoning, how to get projects financed, and how to set up a homeowner association and condominium association," he adds.

"There isn't one aspect of the homebuilding business that we don't have recommended procedures for everyone to follow," Rini continues. "We freely share our 30 years of collective wisdom as part of our system."

### Gratifying Work

Many of Epcon's Franchise Builders come from very different backgrounds, Rini says. "For example, we have a brand-new franchise in Iowa that was a custom builder, and others in Wisconsin and Michigan that came from marketing backgrounds," he says.

Epcon also recruited two married couples in western Pennsylvania. "One was a homebuilder; the other started in a bank doing mortgages and saw the success of Epcon," Rini recalls. "So he left his job to become one of our homebuilders."

This work is very satisfying to its franchisees, he asserts. "I don't think there's anyone in the Epcon homebuilding business in the United States that wouldn't say, 'I'm so proud of the neighborhoods I've developed,'" he says.

Rini knows this sense of satisfaction first-hand. "I've changed peoples' lives by giving them a quality, safe and comfortable home to live in," he says. "It's just a very gratifying industry to be in."

### Well Trained

Epcon takes pride in its franchisee training. For example, "We bring in nationally recognized new homes sales trainers," Rini says. "Our in-house vice president of marketing and sales also does

quite a bit of training and coaching for our Franchise Builders.”

The company also offers supplemental training. “We bring in building scientists to meet with the Franchise Builders and owners to coach them on effective and practical ways to construct a home,” he says.

Epcon recruits nationally recognized financial and accounting consultants for business management. “We visit our Franchise Builders to go over their business plans and current construction and marketing programs,” Rini says.

“We also offer monthly webinars that are almost like town hall meetings where we discuss current business updates, such as our newest national account partner,” he says. “Every month, there is a pertinent topic, whether it be the best practice in a market or best practice in construction or new information.”

Epcon also has its marketing co-op, Rini adds. “[It] releases a periodic update of new products, promotional materials and services that are available to the Franchise



» The company says it sees a lot of potential for growth as it adjusts to the market.

Builders. It might be new renderings or new images of the products, or anything to do with the marketing of the homes to the retail buyer,” he adds.

### Staying Comfortable

Epcon has a bright future, Rini offers. “We have a very large market that is growing every day,” he says. “We are certainly in an enviable position with our market niche.”

But that does not mean the company is

resting on its laurels. “Research and development is at the forefront of everything we want to provide to our Franchise Builders,” he says. “We are looking to improve our existing and new products and remain on the cutting-edge of homebuilding with our market niche.”

Epcon will continue adapting to the market as it grows for the next 10 to 15 years, Rini predicts. “We’re very comfortable what our future is going to be,” he says. ♦

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