

a solution to the work commute



a home built at the worksite

For a builder to be commissioned to build a home that includes space for a home office is not unusual. Nor is it unusual for a builder to be asked to build an addition onto an existing home to accommodate a business. With the growing number of home businesses cropping up during this age of advancing technology, both requests are fairly common. What's not all that common (actually quite unusual) is for a builder to be called upon to construct an addition onto an existing business—an addition to house a home.

Leola home builder Gerald Graham of Norman L. Graham, Inc., got such a call.

“My father, Norman, the founder of our company has been building custom homes and additions since 1951. I joined in with him in 1991. Between the two of us, we have quite an extensive portfolio of projects, and many of them were unique. In terms of uniqueness, this one is in a league of its own.”

During his initial meetings with homeowners, Jim and Mary Ann, Gerald questioned their resolve to building their home onto their trucking business—literally. They actually wanted their home physically attached to the business. After all, he pointed out, given the complexities of the project (see *Scope* in the *Project Description* on the right), not to mention its



SPOTLIGHT

project description

Type:	The addition of a home physically connected to an existing business.
Contractor:	Norman L. Graham, Inc. (see ad p. 35)
Trade Partners:	Beechdale Builders (see ad p. 41) Beiler's Woodworking, LLC (see ad p. 38) Brubaker Drywall, Inc. (see ad p.42) Home Climates Heating & Cooling (see ad p. 44) Hursh Painting Co. Inc. (see ad p. 40) John's Masonry (see ad p. 42) J.R. Landscaping (see ad p. 34) Mervin Zimmerman Inc./The Bath Barn (see ad p. 44) Musselman Lumber Inc. (see ad p. 37)
Scope:	<p>The owners purchased a warehouse that was a former school bus “depot” for a private company that provided transportation for a local school district. They then set up their own trucking company. Attached to the bus garage was a small office out of which they ran their business. The owners maintained their home approximately a half mile away. After several years in business they grew tired of maintaining a home along with their business property. They already spent most of their time at the business so the thought occurred to them, why not build a house attached to the business and just live where they work.</p> <p>Also part of the overall project and occurring concurrently was the renovation and expansion of the business facility. This commercial component was separate and apart from the residential component contracted to Norman L. Graham Inc. in which they renovated the office portion of the existing structure into a living area. Structural investigation needed to be done to determine if this existing building and foundation could support a new second floor addition to house the bedrooms. The first floor office area was also expanded to provide adequate space for a sun room, kitchen, powder room, and laundry space. A three-car residential garage was also constructed.</p> <p>The challenges of all this were numerous. After determining that the existing structure was adequate to support the new second floor the design criteria of the owners was to construct a home that was attached to the warehouse. It needed to look like a beautiful new home—not like something just attached to a commercial building. Also the building code required that the residential structure be separated from the commercial portion with a fire wall extending above the roof. The challenge was to hide this fire wall as much as possible in order for the house portion to still look like a house.</p>



BEFORE

Jim: We had been talking about a new house for years and although we lucked out in finding an existing commercial property in a great location to accommodate our business, we didn't have much luck on finding a house that appealed to us. As a result, we kind of put the idea on the back burner...which, as it turned out, was a good thing.

In my business, I'm on the road a lot—sometimes for a week at a time. In the course of doing business, it was frequently necessary for Mary Ann to fax or email me necessary information—sometimes late into the evening hours or even later. Although we only lived a quarter of a mile away from the office, to jump out of bed on a snowy night, it might as well have been 10 miles. One weekend I got home and Mary Ann finally confided in me that she was no longer comfortable going down by herself to a big dark building in the middle of the night. Right then and there, I knew we had to do something.

And although Mary Ann suggested that we build a home on site, I knew the lot was not big enough..not with the truck parking that was required.

Mary Ann: So I said, “why not build them together—physically connect the house to the business?” There would be room. After all, we stayed here a lot as it was—even overnight. We had rooms on either side of the office area. On Saturdays we were here all the time.

Jim: Yeah, we had a couch and a TV and in the kitchen area, a microwave and refrigerator. I guess we did spend more time here than at the house. So why are we paying taxes on two properties?

Mary Ann: I told him, “this is crazy, why don't we just build here?” As it was, we were struggling to take care of both properties the way we wanted to...the “right” way. When we had time, we would do a little here and a little there. We were spread too thin. I felt it was time to put some things together and get organized.

resale challenges down the road, it would be less expensive and a whole lot safer to build a detached home on their property or on a neighboring lot.

In short order, Gerald got his answer.

And so did we...and then some. Sitting down with Jim, Mary Ann and Gerald here's what they told us.

Your original home was located a quarter of a mile from your trucking business, why wasn't that close enough?

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Jim: Although I didn't think it possible to get the necessary approvals from the township, we started making inquiries and we called Gerald.

So how is that you came to know Gerald and why did you select his company, Norman L. Graham, to do your project?

Mary Ann: His father did work for my parents and I will just never forget that name. I said to Jim years ago, Norman Graham is going to build my house someday. When we finally decided to build, I said it's time to call Gerald. Although the bank required us to get additional bids, there was no way someone else was going to be building my house. Gerald had already made preliminary drawings and we really liked what we saw.

Jim: Fortunately Gerald's bid was right in the middle, so there was no problem.

Recognizing that you didn't want to take away any space from the trucking operations, were there other reasons why you wanted the home attached to the business?

Mary Ann: For me, it was important that when the guys were away, I could walk through the door right into the office and not have to worry about going outside into the weather.

Jim: As I mentioned earlier, when we're on the road, our



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requests for Mary Ann's help often come at some terribly late hours. The fact that she can now respond without having to go outside is very reassuring.

Earlier you said that you had often dreamed of a Norman L. Graham built home. In those dreams did you have any specific ideas as to what your house would look like? Or what it would include?

Mary Ann: I had a few ideas... not many. I knew we wanted open spaces and an open staircase. Other than that, I was receptive to hearing Gerald's ideas.

Jim: For me, having stayed at various hotels over the years, I always liked open staircases. I guess I liked being able to see what was going on down below. Another thing we wanted to do was make the downstairs handicapped accessible—just in case.

Gerald: Given these guidelines, I basically just started play-



ing around with different design ideas—using the original concrete slab of the demolished old office as the footprint.

That footprint was actually 55' by 20' but we added a section to the front as well as space for the garage and a piece on the far side for the sunroom. And because the original



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building was designed as a one-story facility, we didn't know if the foundation would support a second floor. We excavated the old footings, measured them and had an engineer come in to see if we could do what we wanted to do on top of what was already here. We could.

Because the whole place was only 20' deep, it allowed us to keep it wide open even with a second level spanning the entire distance. From the front it looks huge. It's the illusion that we wanted—the illusion of a great big house.

Mary Ann: I have to smile because we've had a lot of people comment that we had built a mansion.

What other feedback are you getting from your friends and neighbors?

Jim: Early on, people were questioning why we would do this? Why build a home where you work? What they didn't understand is that I was born and raised on a dairy farm. There, we lived with our business every day of our lives. It's what I'm used to. Besides, being a long-haul truck driver, the last thing I need is a commute to the shop.

During most construction projects, there are surprises that surface and last minute changes to the plans. What was your experience?

Mary Ann: There were times when we would get an idea and just drive right over to Gerald's office and knock on his door—he always made time for us. Gerald was very accommodating with everything we wanted to do...he just made it work.

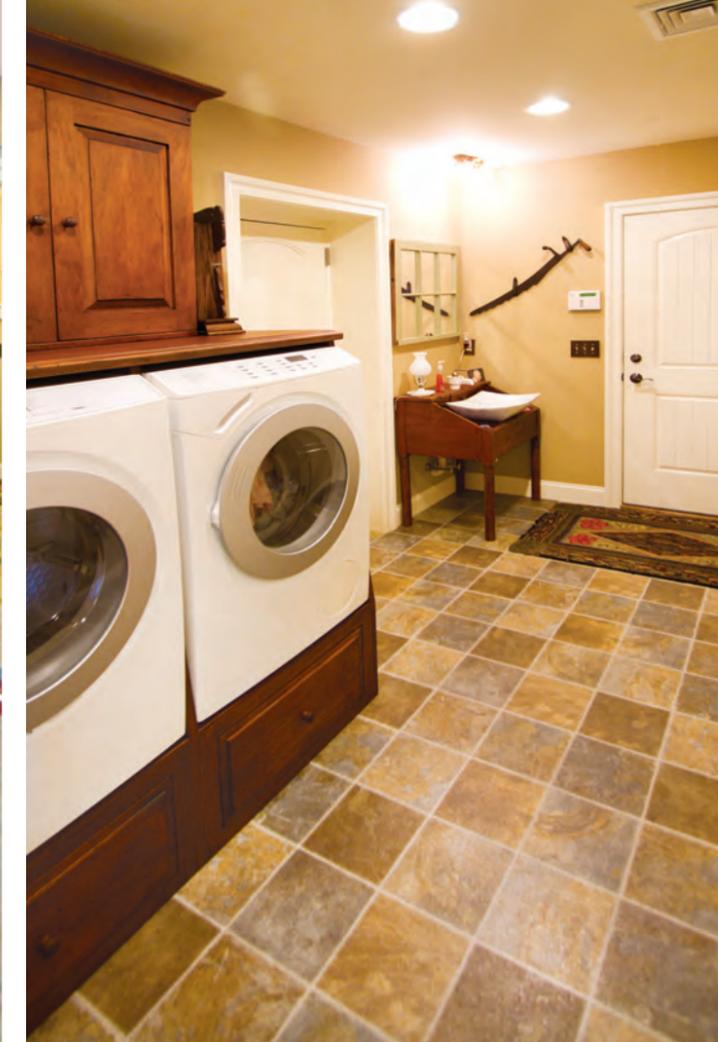
Jim: And speaking of making it work, there was a point late in the framing phase that I noticed that the master bedroom appeared smaller than I expected and that the walk-in closet seemed excessive. Although it was built based upon the plans we approved, Gerald arranged for the studs to be moved two feet to accommodate our concern. And that was one of the best decisions we could have made. We love the size of the bedroom and the closet is more than adequate.

Gerald also made it work a little later after we realized a door in our bedroom needed to be moved to accommodate a dresser. Unfortunately, we didn't catch this until everything was completed—wiring, drywall, trim work, painting.

Mary Ann: How embarrassing... I said there's no way we're going back to Gerald with this.

Jim: But we did. Gerald immediately sent out his guys and took care of it. They ripped out the doorway, moved the wiring, moved the door, redrywalled and repainted...you'd never know it. Quick and easy and it was done.

You obviously have a farmhouse theme going on...would you like to comment?



Jim: Creating a farmhouse feel was definitely our goal. We both love the look. For me, it takes me back to my upbringing.

Mary Ann: Aside from all our personal collections that you see displayed, I think it all starts with the rustic cabinetry

which was custom made by Beiler's Woodworking in Talmage. They do beautiful work and were absolutely wonderful to work with.

Jim: And they were very responsive when we needed them as when the kitchen cabinetry was first put in. Although we loved the look, there was something visually missing between

the corner cupboard above the sink and the cabinet to the right of the stove hood.

Mary Ann: I think we walked down the steps one morning and both realized that something was definitely missing in that empty space.

Jim: I called Vernon Beiler to voice our concern and within a day and a half, he had it taken care of. He knew exactly what was needed to fill the void and he was spot on. It ties everything together and we couldn't be happier.

Gerald: We've had a close working relationship with Beiler's Woodworking for years. And after sitting down with Mary Ann and Jim, I knew they were looking for a unique look but would need some design help and creativity to get there. The guys at Beiler's are real craftsmen—they have a knack for reading their clients and delivering.

Mary Ann: Not only did they do all of the cabinetry for the kitchen and bathrooms, they also designed the built-in entertainment center with the roll-down doors.

Jim: I wanted roll-down doors because I didn't like the idea of swinging doors hanging open to work the remote

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They also did some custom work in the laundry room creating a cabinet that not only houses the washer and dryer, but provides a matching base for an old top cupboard that came from our family farm.

I can remember that piece from when I was old enough to walk. Back then, it didn't have any doors and was hanging from a wall filled with old tractor and sprayer parts, among other things. It had a bottom part but the legs were of

different lengths. Anyway, my mother always told me to hang onto these—they are very old.

When I showed the old pieces to Vernon, I asked him if there was any way we could incorporate them into the laundry room. For the top piece, Vernon's solution was to put doors on it and build a matching base for it to sit on above the washer and dryer. For the bottom piece, Vernon evened out the legs and it now serves as a vanity supporting a wash basin. What Vernon did—I never would've guessed that they would one day be showpieces in our home.

Mary Ann: The mirror above the vanity came from my parents house. I don't know what we have that isn't from the old farmhouse or my parent's house. And the built-in piece housing the washer and dryer, it even has drawers. Even though we didn't talk about it, Vernon just seemed to know that we'd like it.

Your switch plates and receptacle covers are unique. What can you tell us about them?

Jim: Originally, we had the off-white plastic ones, but we didn't like them very much. So we decided to replace them with something more homey. In this little house, you wouldn't believe

how many we have—110—we counted them. I mentioned to Vernon that we had a bunch of old barn doors from the farm and asked whether he could make switch plates out of them. He had me bring a sample as well as the sizes and the rest is history.

Mary Ann: I don't think there was anything that we asked of the Beiler's that they didn't say okay to.

What else came from the farm?

Jim: Many of the picture frames you see were made out of the barn wood siding.

Mary Ann: Much of what you see either came directly from the farm or from things we picked up along the way. The scales sitting on the coffee table in front of the fireplace for instance.

Jim: Outside, there's an old-horse drawn cultivator that came from the farm. The pedestal of our water feature is made out of barn siding. In the flower beds, there are four different animal shaped welded sculptures made out of junk material—railroad spikes, horseshoes, bolts, nuts, and the like. They came from my uncle and aunt in Arizona who built things like that.

Mary Ann: It's kind of funny, when we were first married and starting out, we wanted everything to be new and to match. And now, we're back to whatever came from mom and dad.

Jim: These are things that have great sentimental value.

To avoid attaching toilet paper holders to the walls of the bathrooms, I made holders from cast-off farm items such as disc blades, a tire pump, and a weather vane/lightning rod from the old barn for each bathroom.

Speaking of things that don't match but look absolutely great just the same, are your barstool seats. No doubt there's a story with each one.

Jim: These are all tractor or implement seats that came from our farm. The green one's color is original—it's a



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John Deere. I welded a washer and put a little new paint on it. The others you see include a Fuller-Johnson cast iron seat painted New Holland Tractor Blue. The other two are stamped steel seats painted Allis-Chalmers Orange and International Harvester Red. Those seats were all pretty well rusted when I came upon them...I have no idea what their original colors were.

Now that your project is completed and you've had some time to actually live it, how do you feel about it?

Mary Ann: We absolutely love it..I don't know what else to say other than that.

Jim: Although I love the way it turned out, if there was one thing I could change it's the distance we are to the road. Ideally, I'd prefer to be another 10 feet away.

Gerald: Not much we could do about that, but we did modify the front wall to deaden the outside noise.

Mary Ann: And it makes a big difference—it softens the outside noise so well, we don't even notice it.

Jim: Every now and then we have a trucker buddy with train horns go by—we definitely hear him.

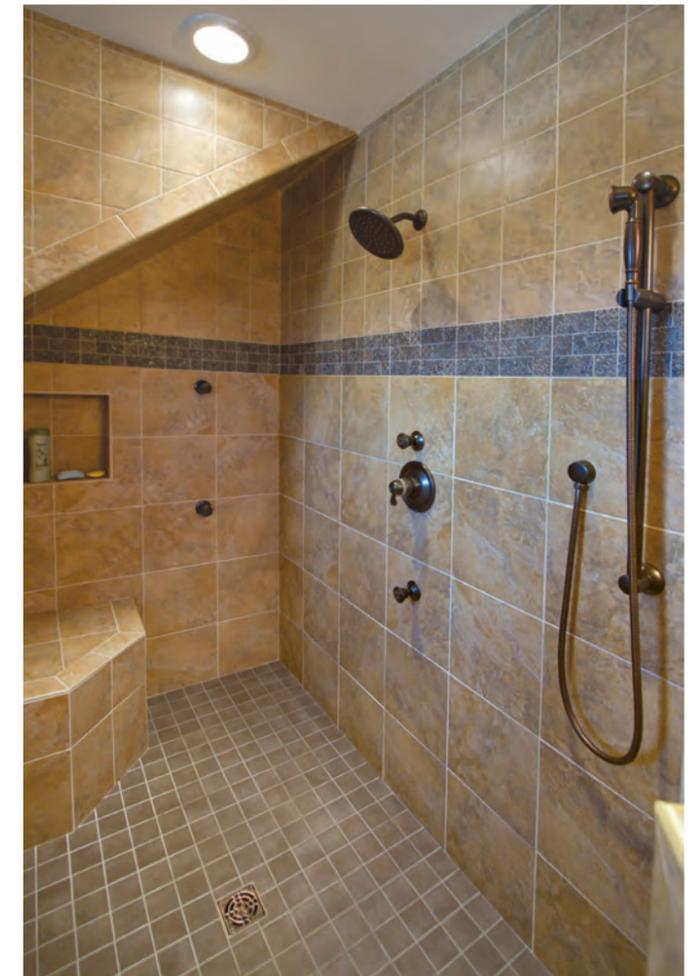
Mary Ann: Another thing just came to mind when thinking about what we'd do differently. Well, we absolutely love the in-floor heat in our master bath and if we had to do it over again, we would go that route throughout the house.

Earlier, you talked of the fine work done by Beiler's Woodworking, how was your experience with the other trade partners?

Jim: They were all excellent—all of them. I think Gerald has put together a great team and that's exactly what it felt like—a team. Even with our changes, we experienced nothing but total commitment and an eagerness to please us. And they did!

Mary Ann: We love our new master bathroom which was done by Mervin Zimmerman. The fixtures came from The Bath Barn which has a great showroom loaded with a variety of beautiful products. They did a great job educating us and helping us with our selections. Everyone involved was just so great to work with.

Jim: A year after we moved in, Gerald conducted a follow-up inspection just to make sure every-

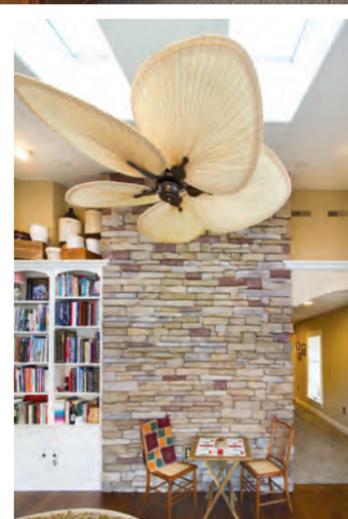


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thing was up to snuff. Part of the outcome was he had the painter, Hursh Painting Company, come back and do some touch-up work and they were wonderful. They made the place look new again with absolutely no mess.

Any last thoughts?

Mary Ann: Working with Gerald and his team was a great experience. They were so accommodating and made everything seem so easy.

Gerald: I love to design and this project had some good challenges. Because Mary Ann and Jim didn't have a lot of preconceived notions, I had some license to get creative. A lot of clients will show me something from a newspaper or a magazine and want me to replicate it. On this project, we pretty much just started from scratch which for me is always fun—I like the challenge.

One of the bigger challenges on this project was how to hide the fire wall that separates the house from the business. It was important that the house portion look like a house. I believe this was accomplished. As you drive past the property, I think it's difficult to detect that the house is actually attached to a commercial property.

Jim: [chuckling] That's probably why we get so many "mansion" comments.

Seriously, we are just thrilled with the whole place and how everything turned out. Now, if you could just find a way to put 40 acres on the back of the property...

R&A



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