

CCS Construction LLC

Building Rockford from the ground up

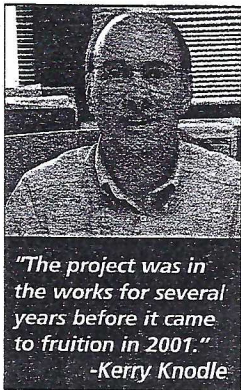
ONE LOCAL BUSINESS, **CCS Construction LLC**, met all but one of the criteria for *IB's* Fast-Growing Companies list – it is a subsidiary. Even though that precludes the company from being named to the list, the firm's tremendous growth and the work done – not only by the company, but also by the non-profit parent company, Comprehensive Community Solutions, Inc., – merits mention.

Comprehensive Community Solutions, founded in 1992, operates programs that focus on education and job training for high school dropouts through YouthBuild and affordable housing and neighborhood development through Project Welcome Home. Just over three years ago, CCS Construction LLC was incorporated as a separate, for-profit subsidiary of Comprehensive Community Solutions.

"What prompted the new company was the development of Lincolnwood Estates, a subdivision with a 50/50 mix of low income and market-rate single family housing on Rockford's west side," said **Kerry Knodle**, CEO of CCS Construction. "The project was in the works for several years before it came to fruition in the fall of 2001. We thought it would take about three years to sell and build the 26 home sites, but at the end of 2002, we had sold 23 lots and had 22 homes either started or completed."

The project spurred CCS Construction's 91.9% revenue growth from 2001 to 2002. "We didn't anticipate that large of a growth, but demand in the subdivision was more than anyone expected," Knodle said.

The fast-paced growth could have easily overwhelmed CCS Construction. "The growth was almost painful at times," Knodle quipped. "We had people ordering houses to be built and we had to get them done. Everyone in the company rose to the challenge of the increased workload."



"The project was in the works for several years before it came to fruition in 2001."
-Kerry Knodle

In addition to the heavy construction schedule, CCS Construction moved to a new location on South Main Street late last year. "The move was, in part, to implement our plan of opening a construction component manufacturing arm of CCS Construction," Knodle said. "In the next couple of months we'll be set to begin manufacturing wall and floor panels and trusses that are

assembled in the factory and trucked onto the construction site."

Knodle was quick to point out that this isn't pre-manufactured housing, where a entire home is built in the factory and moved to a site. "This is just an option that not only lowers the cost of building a home, but it also allows some of the construction to be done in the controlled environment of the factory," Knodle stated.

CCS Construction will market the panels to agencies such as Habitat for Humanity, the Housing Authority, the City of Rockford, or anyone who wants to lower the cost of building a home.

"We're not out to compete with the big companies that do this," Knodle admitted. "It is another way to keep the company growing and create more jobs."

CCS Construction provides construction training for the YouthBuild program operated by Comprehensive Community Solutions. "This is an opportunity for a for-profit company to do what it is suppose to do, which is make money," Knodle said. "And have those efforts contribute to community development goals here in Rockford."

"If you are just building houses somewhere, that is a good thing. If you can build houses and at the same time contribute to the larger community improvement goals, that's a really great thing. I think that is the definition of reward in this case." ■

To that end, Dickerson & Nieman makes title service and mortgage financing (using the institution of the buyers choice) available at the agency's locations.

"We want our offices to be as close to one-stop shopping as possible," Wehrstein said. "The more we can help our agents take care of their customers, the more business we all receive."

Dickerson & Nieman's current niche is residential real estate, but Wehrstein knows that expansion into the commercial real estate market is important. "I will admit that the commercial market is hard to break into, but we want to offer as many services as possible and commercial is what we are working on," he stated. "If an opportunity comes along that we could buy a commercial firm and it is a deal that is in the best interest of the company . . . you never know."

Wehrstein noted that he is making sure that growth at Dickerson & Nieman is controlled. "We don't want to grow too quickly, but we know that looking outside the company for growth is vital to success of Dickerson and Nieman," he added.

R.B. PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

WHEN **ROSS BLUMENTHAL** TOOK THE plunge three years ago and moved R.B. Photography and Video from a part-time profession to a full-time enterprise, he knew that he had no where to go but up. A look at the revenue increase for 2002 over 2001 – 71% – is testament to the direction Blumenthal is headed.



"Three years ago I hit a point that it was no longer just a side business."

"In 1982, I started the photography business, that specializes in wedding, and have had a studio for 10 years," Blumenthal said. "Three years ago, I hit a point that it was no longer just a side business."

Because of his longevity in the industry, Blumenthal has the security of worked garnered through referrals. "I have had to differentiate myself from the competition by not setting any time limits on weddings," he said. "I'm there as long as the couple