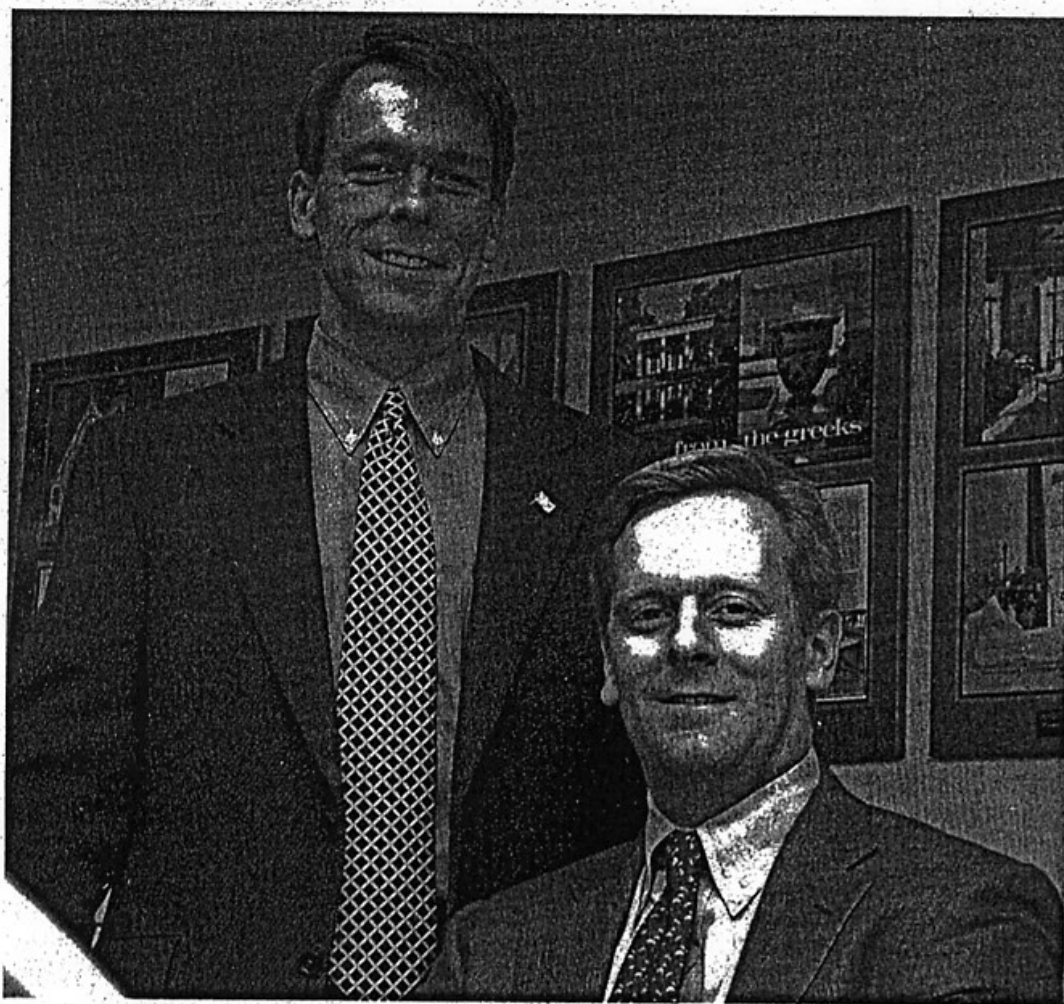


BUSINESS BEAT

Written by EVE MARX
Photographed by SCOTT MULLIN

A Home Cavalry To The Rescue

Hobbs Incorporated Reaches Overseas



Scott and Ian Hobbs

When you're out in the field, away from your post, you're living such a different life that it's impossible for people who aren't in the military to understand what you're going through," said Scott Hobbs, CEO of Hobbs, Incorporated, a 50-year-old residential home building firm located in Bedford Village N.Y. and New Canaan, Conn. Why is a company CEO talking to a reporter about military personnel instead of Tyvek? Because he's got a vested interest in the war in Iraq that goes beyond the surge in the price of basic building materials, like timber and plywood. For the record, a company called Random Lengths, out of Eugene, Ore., which tracks lumber prices, reported a hefty increase in the price of plywood and the wood composite product Oriented Strand Board (OSB), both of which are used in residential construction as sheathing. Random Lengths reported that structural-panel prices reached \$535 per 1,000 square feet last September, up from \$374 per 1,000 only the month before. This "historic run," as the tracking company called it, was in part due to the wildfires that have destroyed thousands of acres of timberland in British Columbia, interrupting logging operations, and that the U.S. Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia recently purchased 20 million square feet of plywood for

shipment to Iraq. "Producers (of the lumber) are aggressively raising their quotes, often several times a day," Random Lengths said.

Hobbs, a military man himself, was a tank officer stationed in Colorado Springs with the 4th Infantry Division from '89 through '92; at work he decided to recognize the contributions of the brave men and women who are currently stationed overseas. "We have several employees who have served and far more who have relatives who serve or are still serving." One employee, Holmes Harden, a Hobbs' employee and lifelong

New Canaan resident, is a Marine officer who joined back up with the Marine Reserves after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Harden was deployed to full active duty last January, causing him to have to leave his job as a project manager with Hobbs, to join an infantry unit he leads in Bahrain, where he is now stationed.

"We all support him here and support his efforts," Hobbs said in a telephone interview. "Last January he got called up and we were worried about him and proud of him and definitely wished him the best."

When Harden had been gone about 10 months, his brother called to remind the company that Harden's birthday was coming up around the holidays and that the company might want to send Harden a present.

"The idea grew to include his whole unit," Hobbs said. "My brother Ian and I put up a matching gift of \$1,000. Our 60 employees came up with about \$1,200. Then a Hobbs employee, Mike Palmieri, worked with Virginia Tate of the North Salem Elementary School, where Harden's children go to school, to have the children send

notes to the Marines to be included in a care package that included candy, snacks, DVDs, magazines, sporting goods, games, disposable cameras, writing materials, wipes and ... toilet paper.

When Holmes received the package, Hobbs said "He was broken up about it. He was touched. It was really nice to know we made a difference to him and to the Marines in his unit. Letting people know what you're going through and that you're undergoing a tremendous hardship for them means a lot to the soldier."

His own military experience notwithstanding, Hobbs said it is a rule in his family that no child should enter the business until they explore the world.

"People are confused about the military because they think of it as authoritarian," Hobbs said. "But it's also about leadership." The similarities between leading a company and leading a military unit are totally apparent to him. "It's about empowering people to do what's right and to act in the best interests of the company. And trying to give them the resources to do their job the best way possible."

Hobbs, Inc. is focused on the extreme high end of custom residential. "The custom part means that the clients go out and find their own land and their own architect and design their project ... and then we build it," Hobbs said. "We also do renovations.

There are plenty of great old homes and then there are the old homes that get torn down and are started over." He spoke of some houses reaching the "end of their life cycle," meaning that the layout is impossible for a modern family or there's no comprehensible or feasible way to install air conditioning. Sometimes the costs of remodeling, "are not worth it," he said.

The company also has started a smaller division to do smaller work, called Distinguished Additions and Renovations. "We have so many prior clients and friends of the company who need smaller projects done. It could be an addition to an existing house, or maybe now they want a bigger garage or a pool house or guest quarters. He is also excited about their newest entity, Personal Estate Management, which is to "help the homeowner with all the homeowner stuff. We

provide maintenance services and upkeep services for the house and the property and we'll do it from a holistic point of view. We built the house. We know how it works. You could say we're the primary care givers ... continuing to give care." The Hobbs brothers, Scott and Ian, grew up in New Canaan. They grew up with an appreciation of New England historic homes. How has that affected or intersected with their home building career? "The majority of what we are building are Georgian or Victorian shingle-style homes," Hobbs said. "But there is a groundswell for modern. There are sophisticated materials now that allow people to explore the medium again. It's exciting to stretch out and do something different."

Hobbs, Inc. has offices in New Canaan at 27 Grove Street; in Bedford Village they are located on the Village Green. ♦