

EYE ON BUSINESS

Chandler LLC

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On any given day, Steven Chandler Hall can be found wearing many hats, but be it a hardhat, surveyor's eyeshades or the thinking cap that he never really takes off, he wears them all with ease and confident tranquility.

Hall is the principal behind Chandler LLC, a West Putnam Avenue-based business that specializes in a rapidly growing business niche: providing independent, third-party project representation and management services for high-end residential building projects.

Such services have long been a mainstay in construction on the commercial side, where finance departments, boards of directors and corporate shareholders

BUSINESS SNAPSHOT

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demand accountability for every penny squandered and every day business gets stuck in the mud due to project delays. In recent years, said Hall, consumers are increasingly looking for professional assistance to help expedite, streamline and ensure reasonable costs when they set out to build their dream homes.

"There are a lot of inefficiencies in the way projects are designed and built at this end of the market," he said. "We try to impose a commercial discipline, and we often save our clients ten times or more of what our fees are." Indeed, in an article in *Architecture* magazine, he was quoted as saying, "Cost and schedule overruns are a stale joke among clients at parties."

Working with architects and contractors, Hall explained, "We sit in the middle to provide management on the behalf of the owner and handle a lot of the nitty-gritty stuff that's confusing to people who

don't know the business." From submitting site plans for approval to learning which utilities options or limitations exist, from the outset of any project, he pointed out, such details abound.

The next step is usually constructing from the preliminary issues presented and client requirements a schedule for each phase of work. "When we finally get the project designed to a point where it can actually be constructed," he said, "we'll ask, 'What are your priorities? When do you want this completed?'"

Most architects would like to have a year or more to design a residence, explained Hall. "Then we're talking maybe a minimum of 18 months of construction," he said. "But if you can overlap construction and design, you can save six months, perhaps more." That's where "fast-tracking" comes in, which refers to choosing a contractor and starting a project when a design is, say, 60 percent complete. Construction can begin because while interior details might be subject to change, a property's "footprint," as Hall described it, won't change.

But conversely, to avoid sticker shock, he said, "Our job is to talk to the owner and say, 'If your budget is an absolute budget, you're probably better off waiting until the design is closer to 90-100 percent complete before talking to contractors.'"

Once such parameters have been established, Hall and Project Manager Diana Quintero scrutinize every bit of paper associated with each project. Picking up a requisitions book for just one month on a single project – a volume the size of the New York City phone directory – Hall explained, "These are backups for every single penny spent on time on the job. People make mistakes. We typically find \$50-60,000 in requisitions for a job like this in a month that we'll question."

How did Hall fall into his line of work? After a stint as a pilot with the U.S. Navy, while the Princeton graduate with a bachelor's in architecture was contemplating pursuing graduate architectural work, a job opportunity in project management with one of the world's largest engineering-construction firms, Bechtel Corp., presented



GREENWICH CITIZEN photo /Nathan Beck

Steve Hall with some blueprints for a project he's currently managing in Westchester County.

itself. That led to managing bonded projects (essentially, picking up the pieces from projects that had been defaulted on, and seamlessly carrying those projects to completed for an insurer). Ten years ago, with a roster of high-profile corporate work under his belt, he embarked on residential work in Greenwich.

From those beginnings, Hall today has moved on to a side passion of sorts: sustainable building. He first got his feet wet in the area in 1996, when he participated in the United Nations' Habitat II conference in Istanbul, Turkey, and since, has been exploring and implementing options for bringing sustainable building practices into the mainstream.

Locally, interest in the approach hasn't gained a huge amount of interest from customers, he said; overwhelmingly, the success stories have come in work he's done where "green" solutions he's presented have proven cost-efficient remedies to existing needs and requirements.

In one project he worked on recently, for instance, the owner wanted an emer-

gency power supply, which was prohibited in the community where he wanted to build. Hall consulted a designer who deals in solar power, and a system with battery backup, at about the same cost as a backup generator, was suggested. Hall told the owner, "You can get the emergency backup, clean power [eliminating the need for a power-spike converter, necessary in any home where computers are used], and save on your electricity bills by going with this."

Sold. "The owner said, 'That's neat, I'd like that,'" recalled Hall.

On that noodling, which is not necessarily unlike the work Hall does on a daily basis, he said, "The trick is to find techniques that are equal to or better than what is conveniently available."

And what better person to figure out such problems than a man like Hall, who perpetually has his thinking cap on.

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