

You have to See it to believe it

By Laura Armstrong





If seeing is believing, I am now a true believer in the quality and design of manufactured homes that truly meets the needs and desires of a broad spectrum of American consumers.

I had never “shopped” for a manufactured home before, had never really been in one either. So I decided to take a road trip with my daughter through some parts of Virginia and Maryland to better educate myself about the manufactured housing industry.

The trip was a real eye-opener. We saw both good and bad home displays. Of course the bad is what hurts our industry’s image, but the good was actually great and a real testimony to the value, quality and benefit of manufactured housing

First stop was a small retailer in Virginia

Let’s just say it was not picture perfect. As we drove into the gravel driveway with some spotty grass, we noticed how poorly the homes were displayed and there were broken down, discarded vehicles in the yard. A sales person stepped out of the office, said hello and told us to take a look around and come back if we had questions. With that he disappeared.

We went into some homes and met a couple, Ray and

Sandy Hunter from Warfield, Virginia, who were looking for their first home to buy. “We’re renting right now and it costs us \$700 a month. We can buy one of these and it’ll cost us only \$400,” said Ray.

“These are pretty nice, we have some land we can put it on and hook it up to electricity,” added Sandy. “We have some family living in manufactured housing and they suggested we take a look.”

We spoke with the salesman who said “We’re seeing more people wanting to buy now that the economy is down. Most people coming through here want to go to a community,” he said. When I asked how long he had been with the company he said, “Five months, just walked in, I didn’t need any training to sell these things, it’s pretty simple.”

But, simple things like new signage, cleaning the place up, better exterior and interior displays and customer service we learned make an enormous difference.

Next stop was a larger retailer. Wow, what a difference. Paved lots, landscaping, meticulously maintained, a wide range of quality homes at each location and all handsomely decorated.

The homes we saw ranged from \$40,000 to \$300,000 or more. No matter what the price every home was skirting, landscaped and the interiors were professionally decorated.

The salesmen were extraordinarily cordial and professional. They walked us through every home and described the

amenities included in the home as well as the number of upgrade options that were available.

While they indicated that manufactured and modular homes were feeling the housing pinch, they were still getting customer traffic—mostly those in their twenties or those looking to retire. While 80 percent of their consumers have land where they want the home located, the sales staff will help customers either find land to purchase or lease, including a community setting.

My experience is a perfect example of consumers “turning their heads,” just as they do when a Lamborghini goes by. It’s the wow factor.

Consider Maria Quintero of Virginia. “I never wanted to be in a mobile home, but the rent on apartments here is high and they are small, I came here and was surprised how nice they were,” she said.

Maria was planning to work with the retail center to buy a 2,000 square foot, three bedroom, two bath home to live in with her three small children.

Also pleasantly surprised was Nina Buhl. “I literally grew up in a trailer home, and there was no way I was going to look at them again,” Nina told me.

I had known Nina casually for a short time and she told me the story of her experience without knowing that I worked for the manufactured and modular home industry.

“My sister called and asked if I would go look at homes with her. I said I was not at all interested and asked her how she could even consider a manufactured home after growing up in one as kids,” she said.

It turned out her sister cajoled her into going to some retail centers and as she grumbled about it all the way to look at some homes, she said her eyes caught a glimpse of some homes on a lot in the distance and she was shocked at what she saw.

“Wow, I couldn’t believe how nice they were. I had no idea they came that far since I had lived in one, now they look like real homes. And, when we walked through, I was even more impressed. Who knew you could customize, who knew they had Jacuzzi baths or granite counter tops if you wanted them and they are affordable homes,” Nina exuded. “They even have garages now and the kitchens are fantastic. They are amazing.”

Nina’s sister wound up purchasing a home and Nina says she would definitely consider a manufactured home in the future.

I would bet good money that there are many more Nina’s out there. ■

