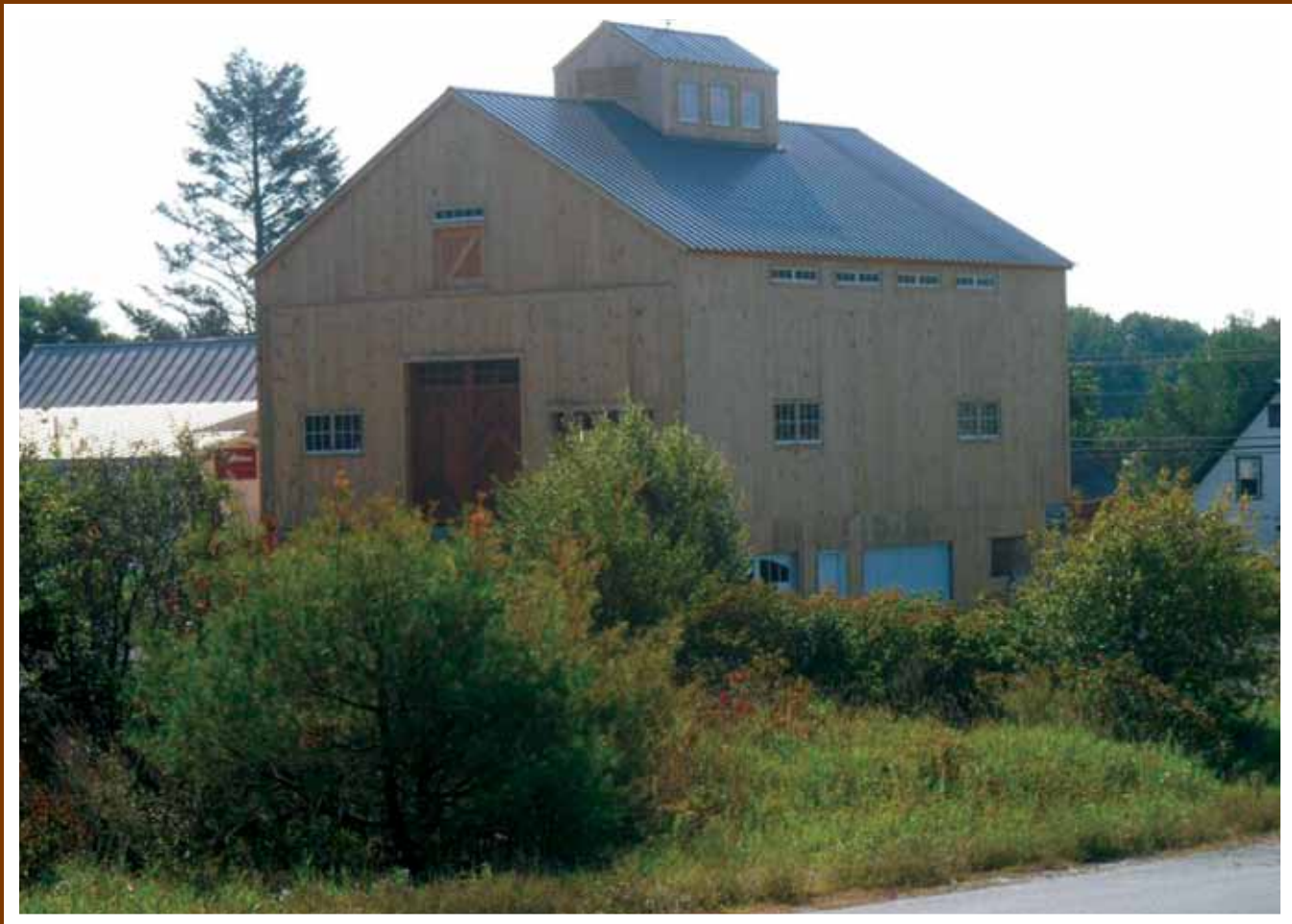


BY TAREAH GRAY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEOBARN

Action Garage Door



IN A TOUGH
ECONOMY, THIS
LOCAL BUSINESS
REBUILDS AND
THRIVES

A PHOENIX OF SORTS, Action Garage Door in Enfield, New Hampshire, rose from the ashes of a devastating warehouse fire last winter to rebuild even stronger and uphold its status as the largest garage-door company in the Upper Valley. Like the mythical bird—living a long life, dying in a fire, and then resurrecting from the ashes—the company’s warehouse ignited when owner Frank Robbins’s plow truck caught fire after he cleaned up from the previous night’s snowstorm and stored it underneath the 150-year-old barn. ▶

GeoBarns uses a couple of unique building techniques, one being diagonal framing, which is immensely strong and precludes the need for sheathing. The double knee braces into the 40-foot free spans also use the roof stresses to balance the floor loads.



Super Bowl Sunday Blaze

In just 19 minutes, the Super Bowl Sunday blaze demolished the historic barn, plow truck, an employee's car, and all the company's inventory. Two 1971 Chevrolet Chevelles stored in the warehouse were

severely damaged as well. Fortunately, the main office of Action Garage Door, located in an old farmhouse just 12 feet away, was spared. "That was my saving grace," says Robbins. "We didn't lose the computer system."

Robbins also made sure the tenants in the farmhouse's two apartments were safely evacuated from the building. "Kudos to the [five] fire departments; they saved the house," says Robbins. "But the barn was a total loss. The only thing I was able to save was the foundation. There was nothing I could do but watch."



An avid and lifelong football fan, Robbins collected himself, went home, and tried to watch the big game that evening; the Green Bay Packers beat the Pittsburgh Steelers 31 to 25. "The fire ruined my Super Bowl Sunday this year. I watched the game, but I couldn't watch the entire thing."

Rugged but Graceful

Enter GeoBarns of White River Junction, Vermont. In just 10 weeks, a small crew of builders erected a new warehouse, staying true to the barn structure. "The Action Garage Door barn was a great build for us,"

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business sense



The free spans above and below allow for complete versatility in the use of space without any interior columns or bearing walls.

says GeoBarns founder George Abetti. “It was the first time we had engineered and built a 40-foot, free-span floor system, so we were happy to have broken some new ground on this project. This is certainly the most rugged and industrial building we have built, and it still looks graceful and beautiful.” Says Robbins of the three-level, 6,000-square-foot, solid-wood building, “The craftsmanship is just awesome.”

The new warehouse has lifted the spirits of all six employees at Action Garage Door, including Robbins’s brother, Jason Robbins, and son, Stephen Robbins. “When I saw the rafters going up on top of the building, it made me finally get a sense that I was going to get back to normal in my business,” says Frank. “It’s awesome. We’ve had more compliments on the structure going up than anything else. We’ve had people stop to take pictures. It’s an incredible-looking building.”

A Growing Business

Action Garage Door specializes in sales, installation, maintenance, and



servicing of garage doors, ranging from basic to high-end and from residential to commercial. They also offer emergency repairs 24 hours a day, and they work with half a dozen manufacturers.

Their story begins 17 years ago when Robbins, now 50, moved to scenic Sunapee, New Hampshire, his wife’s hometown. “I’ve always liked this part of the country,” he says. After spending most of his life in Colorado and Oklahoma, where he worked for the airlines and another garage door business, he garnered enough resources and skills to buy an existing company, Action Door in Enfield, the same year he moved to the area. Robbins made only one change—inserting the word “Garage” into the name. At the time, the business required only one truck and had just a couple of days’ worth of work each week. He created and lived by the company motto “Quality starts

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at the door," and in just three years, Action Garage Door needed three trucks and four employees to keep up with demand. Robbins is not complaining. "The business has tripled since I bought it," he says proudly. "I've worked hard to achieve that. We do a large percentage of service work. That's what keeps us afloat. It's let me put four kids through college."

Action Garage Door continues to stay afloat in a sunken economy where other businesses are struggling. When the recession hit hard a few years ago, sales at the company shrank by 25 percent. The stagnant housing market halted new construction and hampered the demand for garage doors. However, this year, despite the distraction of the fire and its aftermath, Action Garage Door's business is up 10 to 15 percent. "Now people are remodeling homes instead of buying new ones, so that's helped our business," says Robbins. "We're getting more high-end work with home owners now instead of budget doors."

The new warehouse is at the heart of this thriving small business. "The new barn is gorgeous," says Joanne Norton, office manager for the last 11 years. "It's going to be such a better environment for the guys to work in."

Ironically, Norton has never owned a garage, but she credits Robbins for teaching her all the ins and outs of garage doors. "He's a great teacher," she says. "It's a small company. We all work well together. We do our best to make every customer happy. We're a good team." ●

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