

FEBRUARY 2008

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E.O.E. (M/F/D/V)

Timber framers carry on time-honored building technique in Knox County

Trillium Dell Timberworks: Inspiration. Craftsmanship. Sustainability.



Above, Trillium Dell employees use power tools to make the first rough cuts in a timber. Below, owners Rick Collins (highest timber) and Laura Collins (far top left corner) and below them are the Trillium Dell crew and friends who helped raise the frame on the timber frame addition to their home.

Tucked away in the rolling rural landscape of Knox County is one of only two timber framers in Illinois hand cutting massive timbers for new construction and restoration projects. Trillium Dell Timberworks is housed in several brown buildings with shiny, hunter green metal roofs.

The business, which is named after the wild flower that blooms under the forest canopy, is owned by Rick and Laura Collins who live on site in a home that combines a restored timber frame barn and new timber frame construction.

The business is served by Corn Belt Energy and employs about 15 people. They have completed jobs as far away as California and the Virgin Islands but most of their work is within a 200-mile radius including the Chicago area. They spend considerable time carefully cutting the timbers in the shop – making the big cuts with power tools and finishing by hand. When a piece is finished it is numbered and marked off on an intricate blueprint. Then the Trillium Dell crew travels to the job site and erects the project

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themselves. Most interior finishing work is done by subcontractors who consult with Trillium Dell staff.

One fascinating aspect of this time-honored method of construction is that Trillium often uses green timbers, meaning the wood is not air or kiln dried. As the timbers dry naturally they twist – and the crew compensates for that uniqueness when they join them. The predominant joinery method used is mortise and tenon joints with pegs.

“It’s going to move, check, twist – our frames have a lot of character. We embrace the fact that it’s not perfect,” said Mark Meinhart, sales representative. “We’re into high quality not quantity.”

Sustainability is a key goal of Trillium Dell. They pride themselves on sourcing local wood – trees marked by a district forester for removal as part of a management plan. The most common species are white oak, ash, cherry, walnut, fur and pine. The trees are first milled into a square and planed on all sides. Meinhart says they try to use every piece of the tree – the bark is used as mulch or animal bedding while the scraps and sawdust are burned in a central boiler unit that heats the buildings.

And trees only grow so high – the typical height of most of their frames is 20 to 30 feet.

The timberframes are sometimes stained and often finished with a mixture of preservative oils and beeswax.

Some clients prefer full timber framing while some choose partial or a truss roof or other distinctive timber elements.

Besides crafting timber frames, Trillium Dell also produces tongue and groove flooring, trim and moulding of all types. In addition to frames for everything from houses to churches, Trillium Dell also crafts pergolas, pavilions and architectural timber elements. Restoration projects have included historic timber frame buildings, public buildings and barns. Trillium was recently hired to dismantle and move the historic beef barn from the University of Illinois. The company will re-assemble it in Monticello for the Piatt County Museum.

Another unique aspect of the timber frame tradition is journeymen often travel between shops to share knowledge and learn. Trillium Dell has both hosted journeymen carpenters from around the country and Europe, as well as sent employees to various timber framing projects around the world. The employees of Trillium Dell are active members of the Timber Framers Guild (www.tfguild.org).

Learn more about Trillium Dell Timberworks at www.trilliumdell.com.

Water heater rebate

Need a new electric water heater – we’ll help you buy it if we provide your electricity! You choose the size you want or need and we’ll give you the CASH to help pay for it. Buy a 40-gallon unit and you’ll receive \$100. Buy a 50-gallon or larger and get \$125. Purchase the heater from any store or dealer but we advise you to buy the most energy efficient model with good insulation.



If you install the water heater on the floor, we suggest you set it on a one- or two-inch Styrofoam insulation pad to prevent heat from migrating to the floor. Send a copy (not the original) of the receipt to the Member Services Department. Make sure the receipt states the size of the heater.

Safety first. . .

Safety training is always an ongoing process at Corn Belt Energy. Tim Baker, Underground Foreman, is in the bucket while Daren Deverman, Journeyman Lineman, “rescues” a dummy. John Lee, Apprentice Journeyman Lineman, prepares to take his turn. Our line crew is continually honing their skills as they learn and use safe procedures.



CORN BELT ENERGY CORPORATION, BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS