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Photo by Michael Jacobson

Jason and Pam Ruhoff, who both grew up living in the country, built their new walkout rambler in the Rollingwood Addition of Paynesville Township. After living in town since 1999, they purchased a one-acre wooded lot in November 2005 and decided to build last spring. When their house sold in just a few days on the market, they had to accelerate their building plans. They moved into their home in November.

Paynesville couple enjoys country living in new home

By Michael Jacobson

A return to country living is what Jason and Pam Ruhoff wanted in their new house.

"We wanted to be in the country," said Jason. "In town is fine, but I grew up in the country; she grew up in the country."

The Ruhoffs have lived in Paynesville since 1999. When they bought their house on the east edge of town, they thought they might have five years without backdoor neighbors, and they could still see deer, pheasants, and wild turkeys out their back windows. Within four years, howev-

er, the neighborhood had been developed around and behind them.

So, they started to look for country houses, but the prices were prohibitive, as even an older house was too much to purchase and to fix up. Then they started to look for bare property. Finally, they came across a wooded lot for sale, on 300th Avenue in the Rollingwood Addition, and purchased it, nearly an acre, in November 2005.

Jason grew up on the east side of Sauk Rapids, in a rural area by the Wapicada Golf Club, and Pam grew up near Pillager, which is smaller than Paynesville, she said. "I grew up with plenty, plenty, plenty

of trees around me," she explained. "You knew you had neighbors, but you couldn't see them."

In purchasing the lot, Pam liked it because of the mature trees and it's being on a dead-end road. Jason liked that it was quiet and affordable, though he actually dreamt of a larger acreage. They also liked its location, being close enough to town to make quick trips to the store, etc., and since both of their families live to the north, they didn't want to live too far south of Paynesville.

"It met enough of our criteria," said Jason of the lot purchase.

Last winter, Jason and Pam started looking at house plans and, by spring, decided to test the waters by putting their house up for sale. They listed their house in mid-April, and it sold a couple days later, giving them six weeks to be out.

"At that time, we didn't have a house plan," said Jason. "When we moved out, we didn't have a house plan."

Jason did not want to have two house payments, so he insisted on selling their house in town before starting to build. They, however, didn't expect to sell their house so fast.

"We got nervous real quick," said Pam

of selling their house while still making plans for their new one.

They actually had wanted to build over winter, when Jason doesn't have to work at the golf course. (He is the superintendent at Koronis Hills Golf Course, while Pam is a patient financial services representative in the business office at the Paynesville Area Health Care System.) Pam said she was very grateful to sell their house in town but shocked it happened so fast.

Both Jason and Pam grew up in walkout ramblers, a design that they both had in mind and that fit their sloped lot perfectly,

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**RUHOFFS -
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they said. They also considered a-story-and-a-half house, but it was larger than they wanted to have and to pay for, said Jason.

They rented a cabin for the summer, about a mile and half from the site of their new house, which made it easy to commute from one to the other. Jason cleared trees in the spring, their contractor started moving dirt in early July, a couple days after the Fourth of July, and they moved into their new house in the first week of November.

Jason, his dad, and his three siblings did much of the work on the house. "Everything from the sheetrocking to the rest of the finish work, we did," said Jason. They contracted for the excavation, framing, roofing, siding, concrete, plumbing, and electrical work.

Pam - pregnant with their third daughter, Hailey, born earlier this month, and busy with their other two daughters, Shelby, 4, and Erica, 2 - couldn't help as much as she wanted. Between Jason's job, his work on the house, her pregnancy, and the two girls, it was a busy summer, said Pam.

When the Ruhoffs moved to Paynesville in 1999, they purchased a spec home and got some input on the finishing touches. They also finished the basement themselves and add onto the house.

Jason's dad had built his own house and his parents remodeled themselves quite a bit. His dad, semiretired from heavy construction, does woodworking as a hobby and built the kitchen cabinets and the island countertop in the kitchen. His dad and brother made all the maple doors and woodwork, while Jason made the maple railing to the basement and installed all



Photo by Michael Jacobson

Jason Ruhoff, his dad, and his siblings did much of the work in his new house, including making the kitchen cabinets, laying the laminate flooring, making the maple railing, and almost all the finishing work. Sweat equity from their house in town, where they finished the basement and remodeled, and on their new house helped immensely.

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Jason's dad made the kitchen cabinets out of maple, including the center island with a laminate top that the family finds very convenient for meals. One unique feature he installed is a corner drawer. Pam thinks the walk-in freezer – with lots of shelves, easy-to-see storage, and an upright freezer – is incredibly convenient.

**RUHOFFS –
from page 2C**

the laminate flooring in the house. They couldn't have asked for more or better help, said Jason. They put lots of sweat equity in their old house and their new one, too. "The equity that we got out of it definitely enabled us to build," explained Jason. Their new house is 34' by 46' with a full basement and three-stall garage. The main floor includes an entryway with stairway to the basement, kitchen with walk-in pantry, dining room, living room, master bedroom suite, connecting to the laundry room, two half bathrooms, and a mud room to the garage. One thing they wanted in their new house was a bigger entryway, Jason and Pam said. A log jam was frequently caused at their old entryway, as people removed coats, etc. "Usually when we have family over, it's not one sister and brother; it's everyone, left and right," said Pam. Even with their family of five now, said Jason, they take more room to get ready. The other thing they wanted was a larger garage. Their three-stall garage is as large as possible and only slightly smaller than the house. In their old two-stall garage, the sheetrock was broken from pulling Jason's truck in, and Pam had to pull their van in at an angle in order to fit. Jason was told that he would never regret building his garage too big and would someday think that it was too small. Even with the new garage full of stuff – vehicles, four-wheeler, snowmobiles, bikes, etc. – "I had everything in there and didn't trip over it," said Jason. Extra storage in garage is nice for the house, too, said Pam. They still have room for a shed in their backyard and created a driving lane on the

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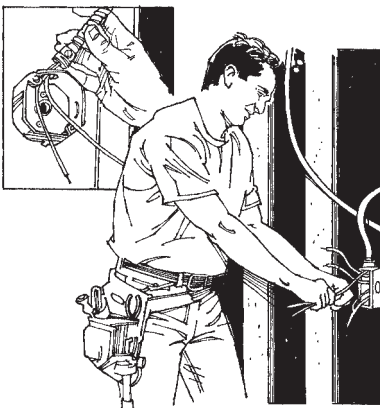


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RUHOFFS – from page 4C

north side of their house – requiring a 10-foot retaining wall, as there is a 25-foot drop from the top of the hill to basement.

The large garage made it easy to move stuff into garage and then put away in the house box by box, said Pam. They would move into temporary housing again, they said, as having a place to stay freed them from the rush of needing to get the house done in a hurry. By renting they also had no maintenance concerns at their temporary housing.

Moving out of their house, into their temporary housing, and then into their new house wasn't difficult at all. Jason said he didn't lose any sleep over having to move twice but he would have worried about having to make two house payments.

Having replaced the vinyl siding on their old house with steel, they liked its durability so well that there was no real discussion about not having steel siding, they said. They picked "classic red" for the color, which they think might be too colorful for a neighborhood in town but looks great in the country.

Coming in from the garage is the mud room, with an adjoining half bathroom. The mud room leads into the dining room, which connects to both the kitchen and living room.

The Ruhoffs wanted the house to be open, with lots of lighting. From the main entryway, four directions are available: into the laundry room and half bath, which connects to the master bedroom; down the stairs; straight through to the living room; and into the kitchen.

Having traffic flow both ways really is nice, said Pam.

They wanted an island with an overhang in kitchen, which Jason's dad built along with the other maple woodwork. "It's easier when I'm cooking," said Pam.

"As things are done, I can put them right here." The family uses the island more for eating than the adjoining dining room, they said.

Their kitchen cabinets have staggered heights, which Pam liked due to the openness and the spaces to decorate on top. All their drawers roll out, and in the corner, Jason's dad built a corner drawer, which he had seen in woodworking magazine. The drawer, using just a longer track, pulls straight out.

Pam's favorite feature of the kitchen, though, is probably the walk-in pantry, which she likes because it has lots of space and things are easy to see. The walk-in pantry includes an upright freezer, which eliminates trips to get frozen food. "I love it. It's the bomb," said Pam. "You don't have to go downstairs or out in the garage (to the freezer)."

They also invested in better appliances for their new kitchen, which they like.

They wanted big windows on the rear of the house, facing the woods, away from the road. They can see the lake, except in the middle of the summer, when leaves are full, from their living room or their master bedroom. And they can see wildlife, particularly the wild turkeys in the area. "The girls just sit here and watch them and think it's so cool," said Jason.

The master bedroom suite, beside the view to the woods, is connected to a bathroom, walk-in closet, and then to the laundry room, which makes it convenient for bringing dirty clothes to the laundry room and clean clothes back to the closet. On the other side, the laundry room is right next to the stairs for the girls to bring clean clothes downstairs and it still is in the opposite side of the house as the living room, keeping it from disturbing them.

The new house is set up for one-floor liv-

ing. "If we were lucky enough to live here that long, we could retire here," said Pam. "The upstairs," added Jason, "is pretty much built for us."

The basement includes three bedrooms (one which could be used as an office), a family room (unfinished so far), bathroom, and utility room. All the bedrooms have walk-in closets because they dislike bi-fold doors. The girls' rooms in their old house were smaller, so their new ones are bigger. They do, however, miss the huge basement family room (18' by 36') in their old house, which was perfect for entertaining.

Jason used false ceilings in basement, which he is glad he did because he can add wires to anywhere easily. Also, a water leak, which they had already, would have destroyed a sheetrocked ceiling, he added.

He is also pleased with their off-peak heat, which has been very efficient this winter.

In fact, they wouldn't change anything major about the house, said Jason, although, like anyone, they would have liked a bigger budget.

Jason still wants to finish the garage (insulating and sheetrocking) before erecting shelves. He already has installed a gas line for a heater (someday). He also wants to build open lockers for the mudroom (for the girls to keep shoes, mittens, hats, and coats in their respective stalls) and would like to finish the family room and office, using cedar in the basement.

Outside, of course, there is landscaping, as well as paving the driveway.

Pam would like to add more blinds and curtains in the house.

"All in all, the whole experience was good," said Jason. "I would do it again."

"I don't want to do it again," he quickly adding, wanting to simply enjoy the new house with his family.



Photo by Michael Jacobson

Returning to country living was a priority for the Ruhoffs, who wanted large windows facing the woods on the back side of their house, away from the road.



Photo by Michael Jacobson

The master bedroom also has large windows facing the woods. Their girls like to look at the stars and moon out of the transom windows above their bed, they said.

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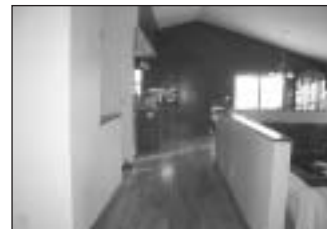


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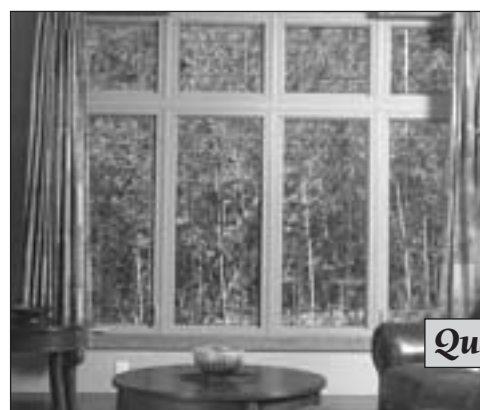
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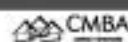


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