



*Dynelle and Rodney Kessler, owners of Kessler Contractors*



*Alan Rector, owner of A-Team Custom Construction*



# Foundations

A history of quality work and long-term relationships have made these general contracting companies staples in the local home repair and remodeling industry.

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by Emily Mulligan, photos by Steven Hertzog

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Some definitions of “general” are easy to picture—the military rank, for example, or an old-fashioned general store. But when that word is put in front of “contractor,” the definition can be a little harder to pin down. Or at least, in the construction industry, it can be harder to come to a consensus about what exactly a general contractor is.

In Lawrence and Douglas County, many general contractors operate in varying forms. Construction Specialties, Kessler Contractors and A-Team Custom Construction have been on the scene long enough to carve out their own niches and define general contracting for themselves, successfully carrying out their own brands as general contractors.



Nick Walters & Mike Wagner, co-owners of Construction Specialties



# of Trust

## Focus on Remodeling, Additions

Construction Specialties, co-owned by Mike Wagner and Nick Walters, has been in the mostly residential construction business since 2015, blending the traditional supervisory role of a general contractor with the hands-on construction trades. The company's own staff does about 40 percent of the physical construction at the work site while simultaneously coordinating and overseeing subcontractors who perform the licensed skilled trades, such as plumbing and electrical.

"We as the general contractor are thinking about the long-term overall vision of the project," Wagner says. "Our expertise is really about planning and communicating with the customers."

The company has 16 full-time employees, including office staff and a full design team. Jobs are booking more than 12 months ahead for 2026, and most of those projects this year are building additions instead of smaller-scale things like kitchen or bathroom remodels—though they will continue to do that work, as well.

Construction Specialties began in a three-car garage, founded by Wagner and his dad, with four or five employees. Now, they own their own building and a fleet of vehicles. Business was great before 2020, but the COVID pandemic made it "take off like a rocket ship," Wagner says, as people were stuck at home and constantly noticing problems and remodeling potential.

"COVID wasn't an economic hardship for us on the money side—it was hard on the getting-through-it side," Walters adds. The company had so much home-improvement business that it could hardly keep up with demand; the lead time for projects went from about six months to 12 to 14 months.

Wagner says that 2025 was not the best year for gaining new customers, with economic uncertainty and increasing interest rates. With the long project lead time, though, they knew they'd have enough upcoming work to sustain 2026. They have made the conscious decision to stay the size they are, even when it has meant turning down potential work.

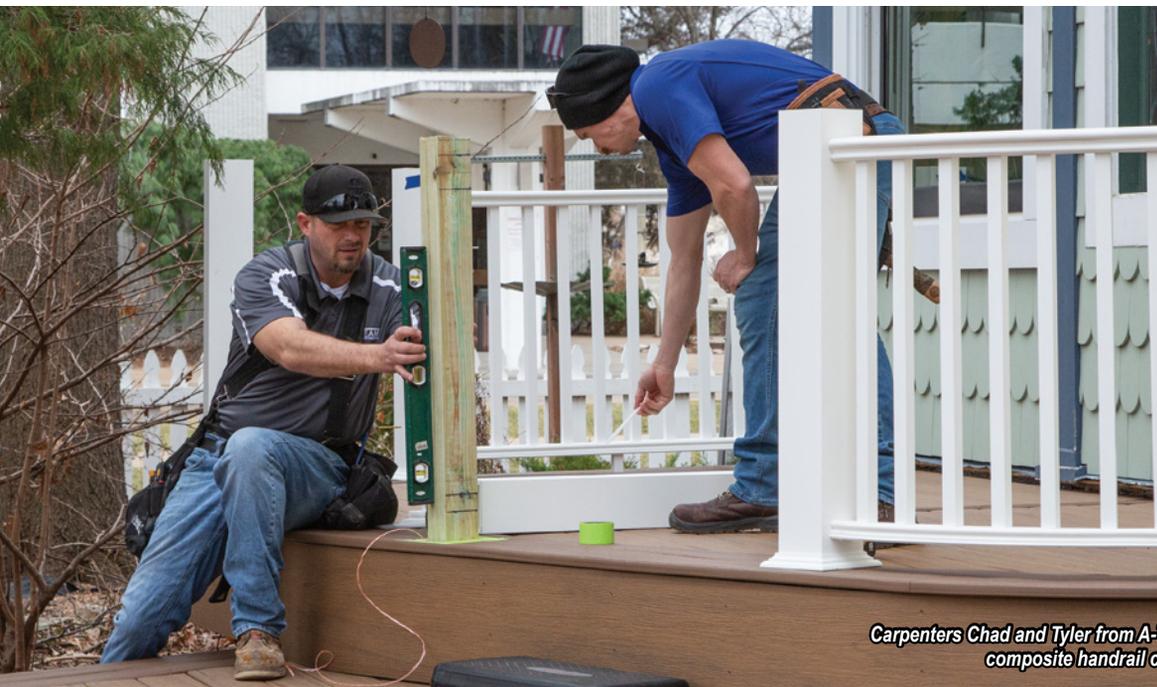
"The need for our business is insane. We have way more business than there are people to do it. 2026 will be mostly additions, which are larger jobs, so we have less customers total. It's a lot riskier—that's the first time it's been this much of our business," he explains.

The company is reinvesting in its employees to keep the longevity record it already has. No one has left the company for three years running, Walters says. Employees have health insurance and 401(k) plans, and opportunities for promotion to supervisory positions.

"A lot of people are focusing on good construction. We do good construction but are focusing on people and relationships," Wagner says.



*Finished luxury kitchen and bathroom by Construction Specialties*



*Carpenters Chad and Tyler from A-Team Construction working on the composite handrail components of the composite deck*

## Professional Maintenance and Repair

As anyone who has ever owned a home or a building can attest, anything can go wrong at any given moment. From deferred maintenance to weather disasters to just, "Oops, it broke," someone needs to stay on top of problems and prevent the preventable.

Kessler Contractors, owned by husband and wife Rodney and Dynelle Kessler, serves residential and commercial maintenance needs throughout Douglas County and beyond.

"Fixing stuff is more of an art than just replacing things," Rodney explains. "I tell people, 'Let me spend your money the way you want it spent.' No one ever has gotten rid of us once they hire us."

Peace of mind for the customer is knowing they can contact the Kesslers any day of the week with any type of problem.

"We have to have someone readily available to fix that hot water tank or

leaky sink. We'll do anything from a full remodel to major cleanup projects," Rodney adds.

Once customers have called them for an urgent matter, and Kessler Contractors has earned their trust through reliability and quality work, often they will hire Kessler for larger-scale jobs, as well.

Three other full-time staff in addition to the Kesslers comprise the company. Dynelle manages the office, while Rodney responds to calls and manages the field. He deploys a full roster of subcontractors, as well, for specialties like cabinetry and electrical work.

Their commercial customers include local banks that have multiple branches, a real estate company and LMH Health for its many buildings around town. Dynelle says business is about 50/50 between residential and commercial work.

The two Kesslers launched the company in 2018, after Rodney took the leap from being a commercial maintenance employee, and the doctor's office Dynelle worked in expressed interest in having him do all their mainte-



nance work. With his military background, Rodney has a flair for planning and organizing construction, as well as experience sticking to a budget. They hired their first additional full-time employee during COVID, when, as Rodney says, “everybody was at home wanting stuff fixed.”

Word of mouth has continued to spread about Kessler's quality work, backed by solid logic. Business is good.

“We are efficient, our turnaround time is quick, and we do a better job,” Rodney says. “We’ve built these relationships with people, and they’re happy to have us do it.”

Kessler often gains a customer when something has first broken or gone wrong—sometimes coming on board in the middle of another company's construction project that either is heading over budget or isn't going well. Either way, Rodney sees himself as a problem-solver.

“Contracting is an open, broad field. We’re not a specialist in everything, but we have people who are. General contractors can make it happen,” he says.



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*Rodney Kessler working with his crew on a project inside LMH*

## Rebuilding the Inside and Outside

You never know when the small jobs can lead to big ones. Sometimes, it can work the other way, too. The through line is that customers won't hire you again unless the first job is done well.

Alan Rector, of A-Team Custom Construction, has high standards for all of the company's projects. He wants it to be great work, not just "good enough."

Most of A-Team's work is residential, both interior and exterior projects. Some projects are smaller work like replacing one window or painting a room, but Rector and crew do larger remodeling projects, as well. As often as not, the smaller projects become larger scope when the customer sees the results.

"I love talking to people and meeting people," Rector says. "I grew up here. Being able to see people happy with our work is the gratification we get."

A-Team employs 17 full-time workers, and slightly less than half the work involves remodeling kitchens, baths and basements. That is balanced out by about an equal number of exterior jobs, such as replacing exterior siding and building decks. The remainder are things like painting, refinishing cabinets and repairing wood rot.

Rector started the company in 2009 after he kept picking up side jobs while working for a new-home builder. At first, it was he and one other person, plus any friends who had time, tackling projects thrown their way.

They stayed busy in the 2010s, and Rector hired consultants to help him see how to grow the business efficiently—to help break him of his micromanaging tendencies. Establishing a hierarchy of trusted job site supervisors allowed him to focus on bidding, sales and other decision-making for the company.

A-Team uses subcontractors for things like roofing and mechanicals, and has cultivated those relationships through the years.

Now, the company's employees have profit sharing, 401(k) plans, health insurance and bonuses, and Rector says the core of employees has been with the company for more than five years, some of them 10.

"We want a team of forward-thinking problem-solvers, not just people nailing things," he says.

With a significant skill gap in the construction labor force since both the 2008 recession and the COVID pandemic, Rector says recruiting new laborers can be challenging. Having benefits and being willing to train them on the job and help them develop their skills has proven to be key.

Work is steady, though 2025 was a bit of a dip from 2024, he says. The company has a physical showroom in south Lawrence that opened a couple of years ago so customers can come for meetings and to preview and select materials. That makes the overhead higher, but Rector says seeing the space often helps clients feel more comfortable with A-Team for larger projects.

He is looking to the future and is considering expanding A-Team's reach to potentially include Olathe or Topeka, or other areas beyond the county lines. He and his team are pursuing sales strategies to make sure they reconnect with previous customers, particularly those who did things such as add a home office during COVID, to see what else they might want to remodel or repair. ▲



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