

Homing in on Bill

In the first of four profiles on Alfred McAlpine's own American presidents, **STEPHANIE BRIGGS** meets Bill Silvestri of Alfred McAlpine Homes USA.

It is high summer in New England, but the rain is falling steadily in Salem, New Hampshire as Bill Silvestri, President of Alfred McAlpine Homes USA, stands hands thrust deep into his pockets, contemplating one of his condominium projects at Hollis Crossing.

Aged 39, a handsome man, his stance with legs braced a little apart and head thrust forward almost pugnaciously suggests that he might have been an amateur boxer in his youth as well as the almost pro-rated junior baseball player he was.

The recent dusting of silver in his black hair indicates the present worries he has in operating in the currently depressed North Eastern property market.

In 1986, when Alfred McAlpine acquired his company, and invited him to run it as President, Billy Silvestri saw his turnover more than double since building his company from scratch in 1976.

"But I'm a fighter — I fought hard to build up my original company, through the late 1970's — and I'll still be fighting, when they bury me in the hole", he says belligerently.

Bill Silvestri had come over to check this large development situated on the Nashua River for himself, following a complaint received about the landscaping — a subject which has always been a source of pride to him, in the finish of his sites. The grassy areas surrounding the development of 300 completed homes, together with the flower beds and shrubbery are, to any onlooker, immaculate. But even though the grass was cut only four days ago, some residents are complaining that the landscape doesn't look neat enough.



His decision to come over to see for himself is indicative of the style by which he operates. Bill takes pride in the importance given to detail which has earned him his solid reputation in the state of New Hampshire for building quality homes and office complexes.

His glance takes in the area of current building where a further 180 homes are under construction. He nods his head in satisfaction to see that there is none of the usual building rubble lying around. The area is as neat as it can be.

"I tell you, even when God sends the much needed rain,

some people are never satisfied", he smiles ruefully, "but that's part of the job — always striving for perfection. Never letting up on our standards, though it's tough to maintain in the present cut throat market. I try to give personal oversight to all our projects even though the company seems to generate more office bound tasks these days, which need my attention", he adds.

With his natural preference being to run his operations



outdoors, Bill Silvestri acknowledges that since his company was acquired, he has occasionally found it hard to appreciate some of the requirements needed by a large diversified company with its demand for structured management information, regular projections and long term budgeting. It does business in a different way to that which he was used to as the head of a prosperous, but small building company.

Bill comes from a large close-knit family, originally, as his name and love of pasta confirms, of Italian roots. Both his grandfather and father were builders in the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts.

"I saw my father working all hours, putting his heart into it and still suffering some very hard times", reflects Bill. "My father said, 'Billy, keep out of this business, it brings you nothing but pain'. 'But I told him, hey that's what I want to do with my life. I want to build things. Things, which I can be proud of'. His rapid fire speech becomes more pronounced and staccato, his hands moving

expressively to underline a point.

Throughout all his long summer vacations from High School, Bill worked alongside bricklayers, roofers, plumbers and electricians to learn the basic building crafts. He got down to serious academic work, graduating in construction and engineering from Wentworth Institute, Boston and further study at Arizona State University.

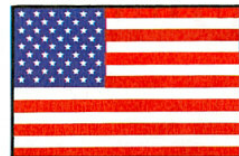
Anxious to get back to what he loved best, he was hired to manage the construction of a 5-storey steel building. "It was a big responsibility for a young man", he reflects. "But I was determined to learn fast and earn respect in the trade. I was a young guy, in a hurry to succeed, so it meant long working hours, then further daily travel to consult with the developer, and a long commute home, dead tired, late each night".

His working day begins around 7.00 when he gets into the office makes his phone calls, plans his meetings for the day, deciding if anything needs his personal attention on site. That day, he needed to rearrange his schedule to fit in this urgent visit and now is conscious of the time pressing, aware that he needs to be in three other places, already. No time for a lunch break — "I'm trying to lose weight, anyway", he grins, as he hits his diaphragm and lights up another Winston.



Catching up with the Site Supervisor, Bill checks on progress and the benefits of a cost cutting idea they had tried, without affecting quality; something at present uppermost in their minds. He talks easily and enthusiastically, his conversation peppered with analogies to baseball, a game he still follows with some passion. Satisfied with progress, he jumps into his pickup to make it in time for a meeting to discuss the sale of land to a hotel chain, who are interested in the company managing the construction of their new building. The company will build condominiums, commercial units, shopping malls or individual homes. Whatever keeps them in business.

Burning up the calories through his fast pace, both walking and talking, Bill will still be up and going until around 8.00 p.m. when any of his community work for the church or to support local business takes over. Bill is a member of the Salem Chamber of Commerce, is active in the New Hampshire Builders Association and gives practical support to the Republican Party. Apart from these, he has little time for more selfish pursuits. To Bill the only hobby is work.



Driving down the road, he provides a running commentary on the state of business, hands coming off the wheel to illustrate his point, or to indicate some land which he is keeping an eye on for future acquisition, when the time and the price are right. He acknowledges passing friends and business acquaintances with a wave and quick banter, indicating his popular and high profile in the community, secure and trusting in the fact that no one will be able to say that Bill Silvestri didn't "give them his best shot."