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**Building connections:
Part of the plan for
Building Shelter Inc.**

By Jack Shea

A group of tourists from the Midwest visited the Island several years ago to see the sights. Several of them were in the home construction business and the sight that moved them most was the quality of work here.

"You can tell that it's all about the work for a lot of these guys," said one visiting builder. His comments came to mind when Ben Kelley outlined his approach to building on the Island. Mr. Kelley has run Building Shelter Inc. in Vineyard Haven for more than four years.

"We are a custom building company. We have high regard for professionalism, integrity, value, and quality. We have a history of large and small residential projects from new construction, renovations/additions, and home care and repair," he said.

"It's important to us that what we build will last, will reduce maintenance costs and energy costs. This is sustainable, green building," he said.

A review of Mr. Kelley's resume indicates

that he knows the difference between good and great building techniques.

"I started out on low-cost entry-level projects on the West Coast as a 'lumper and go-pher.' I did sheet rock, painting, foundations, flooring, siding, demolition work on entry-level housing.

"That gave me a good grasp for value engineering — where we can save money and where it's wise not to try to cut costs. It's useful for our clients. Our focus on professionalism, technology, building science, knowledge of the most up-to-date techniques and technologies offers value to our clients who are concerned for safe homes that offer low operating costs and energy efficiency," he said.

Mr. Kelley shows up as an interesting blend of practical with a fine-tuned and elegant philosophy about his work and its place here and in the world.

A page from his practical book: "We've always taken on projects no matter how small. It's a way for us to develop relationships with new clients. I've had a door



PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

Ben Kelley, owner of Building Shelter, a general contracting and custom home building company that takes on projects, big and small.

Building connections

replacement become a renovation project a year or so later. We did unpleasant work under an old house that introduced us to a new client and a large renovation project.

"We aspire to be one of the premier building companies on the Vineyard. We're not snobby about the projects we take, and we conduct ourselves with the same profession-

buildingshelter.com website includes details of a unique outside shower design and an invisible interior lighting project cheek to jowl with stately East Chop grande dames.

Why? "The Island is a tight-knit community, more than other places I've lived. In a sense it is its own ecosystem within the larger world, perhaps more similar to islands of communities 200 years ago than those connected by today's freeways, bridges, and strip malls.

"The inherent interconnectedness and communality that comes with living in a commu-



PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

Mr. Kelley in front of the shed that he is currently working on.

alism on our home care and repair work as we do on our high-end projects. I love to work on the larger custom projects because of the inherent challenges and quality materials we get to work with, but all of our clients are important to me. They get equal attention and equal quality," he said.

That may sound platitudinous until one considers the nature of some Building Shelter projects and the importance placed on them by Mr. Kelley.

A saying holds that we are best judged by what we do rather than what we say. The

nity surrounded by water brings increased responsibility and empathy that I have not experienced in other places," he said.

"In such a place, it is incumbent on me that I work with my customers as I would like to be worked with.

"Since the Island is a reduced sized copy of the whole, a copy of the world at large, I think there is a larger sense of our place in the world as responsible stewards." ♦

Jack Shea, of Oak Bluffs, is a regular contributor to *The Times*.

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