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## Sisters take on their father's last project

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PARKERSBURG -For Debby Tanner and Cathi Wermter, the construction of Skyview Pointe off Gihon Road is a tribute to their father in completing a project he began. It also has the two sisters working in a male-dominated field of land developers.

Their father Ralph Matheny developed a number of subdivisions in Wood County such as the area around the former Blizzard estate, Wakefield, Woodhurst, Southmoor, Crestview Park and Ralph Lee Estates. Matheny died July 17, 2005 at the age of 93.

Wermter and Tanner said they both have memories of going to work sites with their father. Both said they are not contractors, but developers working with contractors in various fields. Tanner is a local Realtor and Wermter is a U.S. government employee living in Columbus and together they operate Matheny Development LLC.

"I used to go to work some with Dad and Debby did some too," Wermter said. "We've been exposed to this forever."

Tanner said her father was known for driving a bulldozer through his 80s on his various projects.

"Some of my early memories with him were we'd take a bulldozer when up to a blackberry patch when we were done working," she said.

"We'd pick them from the bulldozer which meant we could get to some we would not have been able to reach otherwise," Wermter said.

"I was fascinated by it," Tanner said. "Dad taught me how to drive one of his bulldozers, I'm not real good with it, but I know how to move it at least."

Tanner said when Matheny was developing properties it was during a time when developers did everything on their projects. They remember hiding under his truck when he blasted rock ledges in developments.

"We would hide under the truck and they set those off with a truck battery," Tanner said. "We were always afraid as kids we were going to get blown up."

Tanner said the development is an upscale subdivision, the type of subdivision Matheny wanted to develop someday.

Tanner and Wermter said after their father's death they had to decide what to do with the land. They chose to develop the land rather than sell.

"After he passed away people up here were a little concerned because they didn't know what we were going to do," Wermter said. "In that first year we were still in shock and we just paid bills to settle the estate. It helped our credibility with them when we were ready to jump in and bring in phase two."

Wermter said her father was disappointed when she and her husband moved to Columbus, since he wanted them in his business.

"I believe in the same dream he believed in," she said. "I said I wouldn't be in favor of selling things off, but I would try to finish his work. And, Debby told him the same thing."

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They have a sister, Patti Davis, who is a non-managing partner in the business. They said they faced few problems as women working in a nontraditional field.

"I had a call last week from a gentlemen who wanted to talk with the man who was in charge , " she said. "I said you're talking to him and he said 'I want to talk to the MAN' and I explained we were the ones doing this. It's something we encounter from some people who think there is a man still running this."

Wermter said it's the type of thing they expect to encounter.

"We are in what is a typically male-dominated world" Wermter said. "We are probably one of the few female developers. We've worked with the planning commission and they don't have any issues, they realize we have a level of expertise.

"Every once in a while we see some hesitation and wonder."

Wermter said they have encountered minor problems such as being ignored at a local store when ordering supplies. She said they are comfortable in the field since they went with their father to buy things for houses he was building.

"It's more like curiosity," Tanner said. "We didn't have trouble setting up our accounts. We still see a few who are shocked, you can see it in their faces."

"At first when we were told we couldn't do this, we did some real soul searching and we knew that probably our hearts were guiding us as much as anything else," she said. "We knew what we wanted to do and we decided to jump on it with both feet. We wanted to see this finished."

Tanner said they have always been willing to work and they have thought about building spec houses in the subdivision.

"I think that should be the next exciting phase, we are giving it some thought," she said.

Wermter said they think Matheny would be proud of what they have done, even though they do not do things the way he would have.

"There is a feminine aspect in the way we do things," Wermter said. "We think more about the aesthetics," Tanner said. "He liked the shapes of the lots more uniform, we like to keep more trees and he liked to clear them."