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Up Front



Why you'll see Dodger Dogs on the air. **PAGE 3**

News & Analysis



How Mitch Finkels Las Vegas gamble is paying off. **PAGE 5**

Profile

Despite city budget cuts, a company that builds skateboard parks keeps rolling. **PAGE 12**



Market Has Builder Thinking Small

CONSTRUCTION: KB Home cuts sizes, prices for housing line.

By **DANIEL MILLER** Staff Reporter

When **KB Home** was known as Kaufman & Broad, it had the reputation of selling fairly modest, affordable homes to the masses during the postwar era's long suburban growth.

But during the recent housing boom, the company's revenue and profits soared along with the size of

its houses – until the bubble burst.

However, the Westwood homebuilder thinks it has found a formula for success now that the market appears to be slowly recovering: It is building fairly modest, affordable homes again.

Earlier this year, KB launched its Open Series line, homes that can run less than 1,500 square feet and sell for less than \$150,000, far less than the models that regularly topped 4,000 square feet and \$500,000 earlier this decade.

And it's not just size that differentiates the homes.

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Homing In: KB Home's cozy new model.



End of Road: Randy Thomas will cut the ignition on his trucking firm in December.

RINGO H.W. CHIU/LABJ

DRIVEN AWAY

Ports' clean air program shuts down some truckers.

By **FRANCISCO VARA-ORTA** Staff Reporter

RANDY Thomas has spent the last four decades proudly running his South Los Angeles trucking firm, which services the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

As the ports ballooned to become the largest trade complex in the country, Thomas' business grew from one truck he drove to a thriving little firm with 15 drivers. He put his three children through college – the first generation in his family to go. He was starting to look forward to retiring. He planned to leave his business to his family.

Instead, the 60-year-old owner of **Randy Thomas Trucking** is preparing to close his business about Christmas. The reason: He's unable to purchase new trucks to comply with port regulations taking effect in January.

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SPECIAL REPORT



MOST ADMIRED CEOs

The Business Journal's inaugural group of Most Admired CEOs is a varied bunch. One leads an online document firm, another a notable non-profit and a third a successful discounter. But they have something in common: a tendency to take advice and collaborate while hewing to their own vision of success. Read why these executives were selected as L.A.'s most admired. **PULLOUT SECTION BEGINNING ON PAGE 21**

Applebee's Grows Fat on Discounts

HOSPITALITY: Chain bucks sector slowdown with deals.

By **DAVID HALDANE** Staff Reporter

Diners at Applebee's Neighborhood Bar & Grill in Norwalk had to wait 20 minutes for tables on a recent Sunday evening.

Standing amid signs offering dramatic meal discounts, they seemed content to bide their time. Emerging later fully sated, several said it was well worth the wait.

"They had deals for us," said Omar Wilson, a 30-year-old Long Beach resident who ordered one of the "2 for 20" specials that includes two entrees and an appetizer for \$20. "Times are

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Who Wrote the Book of Love?

In the popular "Sex and the City" movie that hit the big screen last year, Sarah Jessica Parker's character is glued to the book "Love Letters of Great Men."

The book piqued the interest of downtown L.A. attorney and self-described romantic **John Kirkland**, so he ran out to snag a copy. Only to learn it didn't exist.

"I looked for some examples of love letters of



Kirkland

great of men, or the kind that were referred to in the movie," said Kirkland, a corporate and securities partner at Luce Forward Hamilton & Scripps LLP. "And the more I looked into it, the more interested I became."

Kirkland, 45, ended up compiling love letters from the likes of

Henry the Eighth, Napoleon and Leo Tolstoy, and published his own version of "Love Letters of Great Men."

He said about 80,000 copies have been purchased, and the book's been translated into Korean, Lithuanian and Turkish.

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CHARLES CRUMPLEY

So, does Kirkland plan another book to accompany the upcoming sequel to "Sex and the City"?

"I plan to have a second book come out by the end of the year," Kirkland said "There was so much I wanted to get in it, including a phenomenal letter from Ronald Reagan to Nancy that he wrote on Air Force One."

Stair Master

Hayley Amberg says trotting up stairs is not so unusual for her. Employees of her company, Air-Tec, climb stairs every day to install heaters and air conditioners.

Still, she said, climbing the 1,500 steps of the U.S. Bank Tower in downtown Los Angeles a few weeks ago was much more than she's used to.

"It was really hard," said Amberg, chief of operations at the Carson company owned by her father, **Clayton Dunn**.

The trek by Amberg and 50 of her employees and customers was part of what's called Stair



Amberg with medal

Climb to the Top at the skyscraper, which is 75 floors and the tallest building west of the Mississippi River.

The event, which attracted 2,000 participants, raised about \$300,000 for the Stuart M. Ketchum Downtown YMCA, of which \$21,000 came from Air-Tec.

Amberg, 41, said she prepared for the workout by running up and down stairs at the beach.

"It's long, it's difficult and there's no way out," she said of the tower climb, which took her 20 minutes. "I kept thinking that the faster I do it, the quicker it's over."

Best Revenge

Marilyn Barrett likes to make bold statements, whether with her career or with her fashion.

Barrett, 57, left her job as an attorney with Jeffer Mangels this summer as she was sensing it was more economically safe to do so. But starting her own West L.A. practice, Barrett: A Law Corporation, wasn't the only motivation.

She wanted to spend more time on her side project: an eco-friendly T-shirt company she founded called Revenge Is.

Revenge Is sells black and gray T-shirts made from recycled plastic bottles and organic cotton.



Barrett

They are emblazoned with socially conscious messages, such as "Revenge Is Energy Independence." They've even been featured on the "Today" show.

But is she bold enough to incorporate her fashion line with her professional attire?

"I wouldn't wear one of the T-shirts to

court as I wouldn't feel right representing a client wearing some political stance," Barrett said. "I'll have to stick to the boring suits for now."

Staff reporters Alexa Hyland, David Haldane and Francisco Vara-Orta contributed to this column. Page 3 is compiled by Editor Charles Crumpley. He can be reached at ccrumpley@labusinessjournal.com.