

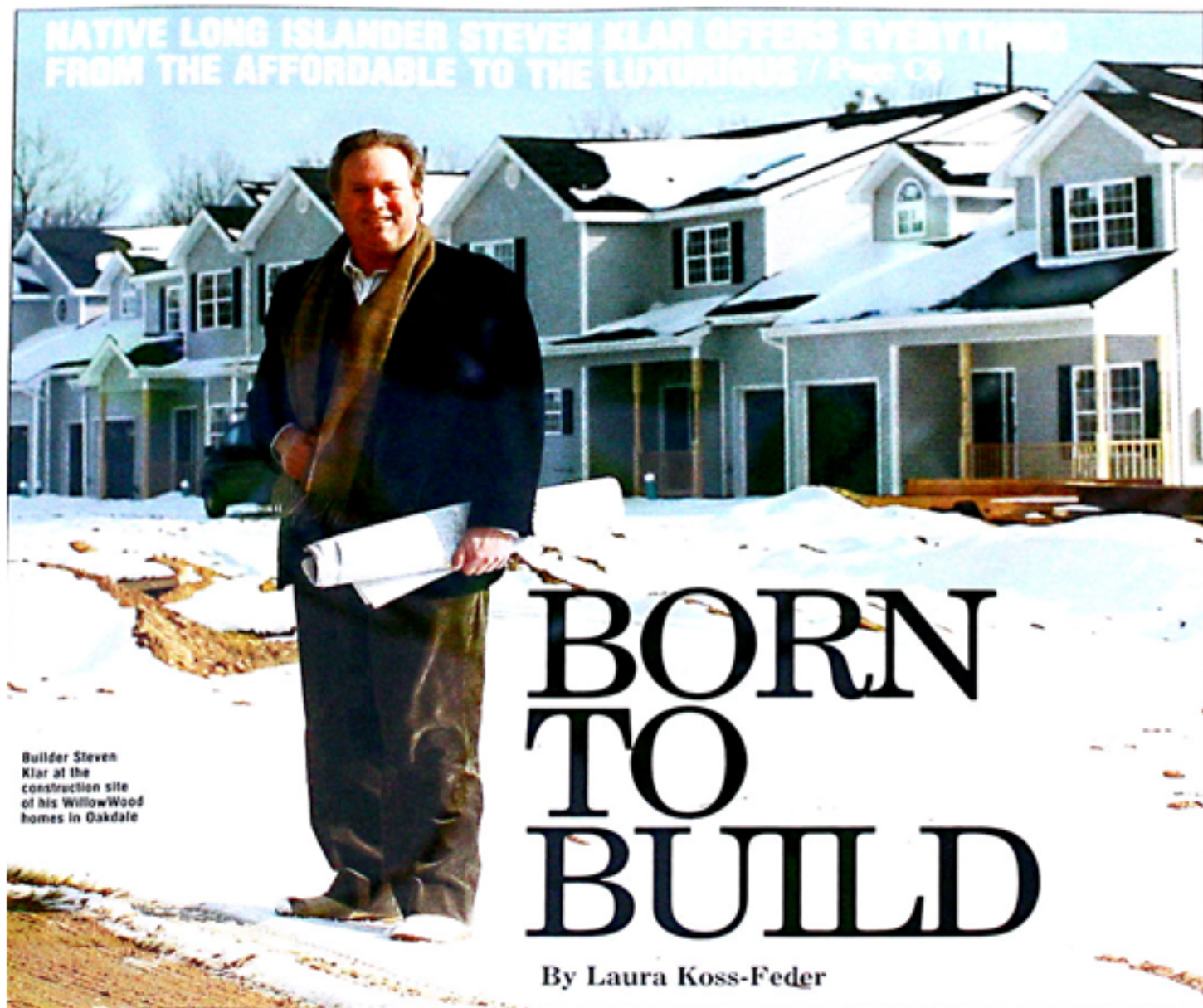
# Newsday

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# Part 3 REAL ESTATE

NATIVE LONG ISLANDER STEVEN KLAR OFFERS EVERYTHING FROM THE AFFORDABLE TO THE LUXURIOUS / Page C6



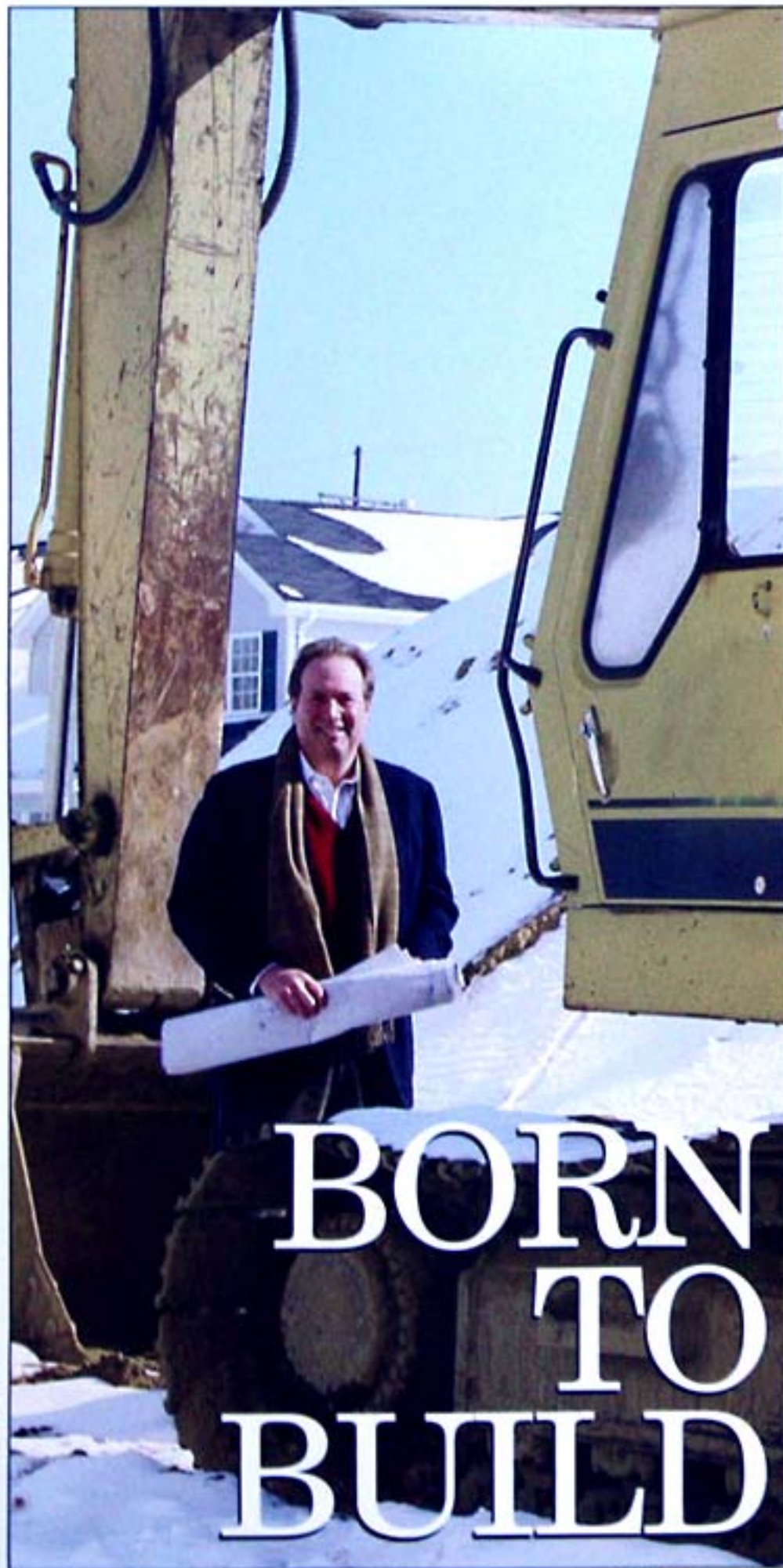
Builder Steven Klar at the construction site of his WillowWood homes in Oakdale

## BORN TO BUILD

By Laura Koss-Feder

Newsday Photo/Thomas A. Ferrara





# BORN TO BUILD

Steven Klar at the WillowWood development under construction in Oakdale.

*This is the third in an occasional series focusing on local builders.*

**By Laura Koss-Feder**

**W**HEN HE WAS four years old, Steven Klar began tagging along on Sundays with his father, Henry, to visit housing development sites. Throughout his childhood and teen years, Steven remained involved with his father's realty firm, working as a sales person when he was just 18 years old.

By the time Klar was 27, he had taken over the reins of the business and now, at 53, he is president of The Klar Organization, an East Meadow-based firm that does everything from designing to marketing the homes it builds, which range from the affordable to the luxurious.

"I love to build and I love what I do," Klar said. "I was groomed to be in the business and it has always been in my blood."

Over the years, the firm has sold about 55,000 homes, a mix of housing designs and styles, including single-family homes, townhouses and condominiums. Prices range from about \$125,000 to \$200,000.

Last month, Klar and Huntington Town officials held a ceremonial ribbon-cutting for the Highview at Huntington — the largest affordable housing initiative the town has embarked on in at least a decade.

Klar was selected by the town to build the Highview, a 100-unit development of two-bedroom co-ops and three-bedroom townhouses that will be completed by summer. Fifty-one of the homes are being subsidized from a state grant arranged through the Long Island Housing Partnership, designed to reduce the costs by up to \$25,000 for families that meet income requirements.

The subsidized two-bedroom units will cost \$101,100 and the three-bedroom homes will sell for \$119,800. The non-subsidized homes will go for \$126,100 for a two-bedroom and \$143,800 for a three-bedroom.

"I did this as a give-back to the community," said Klar, a native of Rye who still lives on the North Shore.

Still, he added that such projects barely put a dent in the affordable-housing shortage on Long Island. Just a week after opening, "a couple thousand people have come through our door" to apply for one of the units, he said. "There's a giant need for this."

Town officials located the Highview on Route 110, within walking distance of the Long Island Rail Road station — a big benefit for those needing mass transit.

"The convenience, design and affordability of this kind of development will allow many to afford their own home and be able to work in close proximity to where they live," said partnership president Jim Morgo. "A willing municipality like Huntington is what builders like Steven Klar need to create these kind of homes which are needed by so many."

For his part, Klar, who is also an attorney, says he strives to provide the best buy in any category of home he builds.

"Our homes are always affordable for the particular category they are in, whether it's a condo, senior housing, or a single-family home," Klar said.

Observers who know Klar say his ability to know what customers want and what the market will bear has helped his company grow, despite turbulent times such as the 1970s, when a deep recession crippled many developers and real estate agents in the area.

"Even in a downturn, he [Klar] has managed to do well, since he listens to what customers are asking for and really understands the market," said Bruce Meltzer, president of Medford-based Triangle Building Products Corp., who has been doing business with Klar for about 30 years. "Maybe that comes from years of being a successful broker before he was a builder."

The history of The Klar Organization dates back to 1947, when Henry Klar, also an attorney,

## COVER STORY



To read previous installments of the builders series, visit Business E-dition at [www.newsday.com/ebiz](http://www.newsday.com/ebiz).





Newstar Photo: Dick Farwood



Newstar Photo: Thomas A. Ferraro



Newstar Photo: Tom Jordan

launched Klar Realty. Steven Klar, while maintaining ties with the business, went to the University of Toledo and then Brooklyn Law School in 1973, specializing in corporate, contract, financing, and real estate law. Klar said he wanted to use his background in law and business and a "sense of social consciousness" to help others — he even made an unsuccessful run for Congress in 1978.

He officially took over the business from his father in 1975 and, in 1979, broadened the company's scope

to include building homes. Since then, the firm has built and sold a variety of styles of homes all over Long Island, including Dix Hills, Hauppauge, St. James, Babylon, Kings Park, and Manhasset.

Local projects currently under construction include the Waterways at Moriches, a 120-unit, gated complex of villa homes for those 55 and older that are selling for \$200,000 to \$260,000. The community offers amenities like a private marina, clubhouse, pool, and four tennis courts.

## AT A GLANCE

### THE KLAR CORPORATION

**Founded:** 1947

**President:** Steven Klar

**Headquarters:** East Meadow (Additional offices in Islanda, Chester, N.Y., Florida's West Coast)

**Employees:** 55

**Homes closed in 2000:** 250

**Home types/price range:** Single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums, ranging from \$125,000 to \$700,000

Also in Moriches is the Bay Colony, which will feature 160 condos for those 55 and over, selling for \$210,000 to \$280,000. In addition, Klar is building Willow Wood at Oakdale, which will offer 67 two- and three-bedroom townhouses selling for \$200,000 to \$250,000 when completed by year-end.

Over the next five years, Klar said is looking to build in areas such as Coram and Yaphank in eastern Suffolk County. But beyond that, he sees more of his firm's work focused outside Long Island, establishing offices in upstate New York and Florida.

"Long Island is running out of space where to build," Klar said. "I hope never to leave Long Island, but there is only so much land mass out there. In other areas, like upstate and in Florida, I also can build a mix of homes with more land available."

Others who have worked with Klar said that his passion for building a variety of affordable homes on Long Island has kept him in the business for so many years.

But they worry that he and others like him

in the industry will begin focusing more on other areas to build such homes.

"We need more people like Steve, who are willing to build a variety of different kinds of housing," said Bob Wieboldt, executive vice president of the Long Island Builders Institute, a trade group in Islanda. "We have a lot of young couples and empty-nesters who need condos, townhouses and two-family houses, not just the traditional, four-bedroom colonials."

Downtown areas with empty stores and offices could particularly receive a boost from the addition of higher-density housing, such as apartments and townhouses, that would help revitalize these towns and bring more people back to Main Street, Wieboldt added.

"It can be difficult for developers like Steven to put up higher density semi-attached homes if neighborhoods are moving more to four- and five-acre zoning," noted David Steinberg, president of Long Island University, where Klar has been a trustee for about a decade. "He [Klar] has been able to make a success of different developments where others have failed."

Pearl Kemer, chief economist for the Long Island Association, echoes such views.

"There has been a 40-year-long resistance to a lot of two-family homes and apartment buildings, for fear that Long Island will start to look and feel like the city," Kemer said. "But the truth is, we need developers to build smaller homes, apartments, and middle-income housing to keep more young people and seniors here on Long Island and to help rejuvenate some of our older, downtown areas."

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