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## New remodeler's council chair leading by example

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by [Allison Shirreffs](#) Contributing Writer

Next to the sidewalk that leads to his house, a few toy dump trucks and dirt piles indicate where little Rocco Sinisgalli is building his "foundation." Most 3-year-olds don't understand the word "foundation," but little Rocco takes after his father, (big) Rocco Sinisgalli, owner and president of **Oneida Builders** and the soon-to-be chairman of the **Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association's** (HBA) Remodeler's Council.

The elder Sinisgalli wasn't much older than his young son when he decided he wanted to build houses when he grew up. In high school, Sinisgalli took a vocational class in which he and his classmates built a house. At 19, he bought and renovated a rental property. When Sinisgalli graduated with a construction degree in the mid-1980s, he got right to work. Back then, he explains, things weren't subcontracted out the way they are today.

"You got a set of plans and in seven months, you did everything," says the 41-year-old Sinisgalli. "[It gave me] knowledge of how everything goes together."

During a college course, Sinisgalli studied heat loss and how to combat it. It was his first encounter with "green building." In 1996, Sinisgalli moved to Atlanta and launched Oneida Builders (named after the upstate New York town where he grew up). Five years ago, Sinisgalli took classes on EarthCraft houses (EarthCraft is a residential green building program the HBA created in partnership with **Southface**, a nonprofit organization that provides environmental education and outreach programs) and became a champion for this type of construction.

In 2003, he bought a house in Dunwoody. He planned to renovate the 1970s house and add 1,300 square feet of living space for himself, his wife and three children. Why not build it to EarthCraft standards and live by example? He did, and the home became a show house for prospective clients.

Sinisgalli invites neighbors and party guests who have come by for one of the family's famous sausage rolls (Sinisgalli hails from an old Italian family) to check out the attic. What they'll discover there: In mid-August, it's not hot. In mid-January, it's not freezing cold. That's because the materials used "keep the outside air outside and the inside air inside," Sinisgalli says. The result? Milder temperature changes in the attic space and

pollutants and allergens kept at bay. And because the foam insulation is sprayed in the roofline and not in the attic, there's more room for storage.

Sinisgalli has completed eight renovations in his Dunwoody neighborhood alone (hundreds over the course of his career), and he believes the prevailing 1970s home model--"five/four and a door"--is ripe for EarthCraft renovations.

During a required inspection prior to an EarthCraft renovation in his neighborhood, Sinisgalli discovered ductwork so bad that pressure tests couldn't even be measured. When Sinisgalli compared his utility bills to this neighbor's, Sinisgalli's monthly totals -- even with 1,300 more square feet -- were considerably lower. "It's really eye-opening [to clients]," he says. "[In these houses] 30 to 40 percent of the heating and cooling is lost before it ever gets to a room."

Sinisgalli feels one of the Remodeler's Council's major roles is education. His hope is that trained contractors will educate consumers and let them know that green building options exist. "The biggest problem with consumers is that they think pollution is mostly due to cars when in fact, it's from coal-burning plants that provide electricity," he says.

At first, getting clients to go green was a hard sell. But in the last eight months, customers started asking Sinisgalli about it. Business is going well for Oneida Builders and the company's 10 employees, and Sinisgalli has taken home two Gold Professionalism Awards from the industry's OBIE Awards.

That Sinisgalli has won awards is no surprise to Lynn Saperstein, an Oneida client who had the company renovate a sunroom and master bath. "Rocco's professionalism is immaculate," says Saperstein. "He's an honorable, respectful, personable and knowledgeable guy." Saperstein, who learned of Oneida through referral, subsequently referred the company to neighbors who later hired the company to renovate their homes. (Nearly 100 percent of Sinisgalli's business is via referral.)

In addition to increasing educational opportunities that concern EarthCraft, Sinisgalli wants the Remodeler's Council to focus on professionalism and how to do business. "Sort of going back to the basics," he says. He'd like to offer classes on networking, marketing, and on how to act professionally.

The outgoing chairman of the Remodeler's Council, Al Capogrossi, president of Concept Creators, a remodeling company, believes Sinisgalli will do a fine job at the helm of the council. "He'll run it just like he runs his business -- conscientiously," Capogrossi says.

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