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## Blenker expands business to serve larger region

AMHERST -- Since opening in 1974, Blenker Cos. has changed and grown to meet the demands of customers in the construction industry.

Originally a remodeling business, over time the family-owned and operated company added construction, manufacturing, contracting and trucking.

But when a difficult economy found the company in a position to have to scale back, Blenker Cos. opted to expand outside of central Wisconsin through the opening of Envision Home at Last, a company that pairs with custom homebuilders throughout the Midwest.

Co-owner Pamela Jewell said the reality of the housing market in the state left the company with no choice but to move in a new direction.

"There's just not enough business locally, and homebuilding levels are not going to bounce back very soon," Jewell said. "To continue to move forward, we have to increase our market share of the homes being built."

Envision provides pre-built walls, floors and other aspects of a home to their partner builders, and also sells other items

such as windows. Builders are trained and have a showroom to walk customers through the process of designing their homes, and later construct the house.

"In a way, it's kind of like a co-op," said Blenker President Jason Blenker. "We are looking to help speed up the process of getting the home that people want built."

As Envision has grown, so has the region in which the company does business. While Jewell said the company previously did business in a circle no bigger than 90 miles from Amherst, the company now is helping to build homes in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Michigan.

That expansion also has allowed Blenker Cos. to begin to add jobs again. After falling from 55 to 42 full-time employees in the past two years, the company has jumped up to 60 along with about 20 part-time workers. Blenker said the company is projecting 50 to 75 percent growth over the next five years.

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"We're looking forward to continuing to grow," Blenker said.

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