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### **NEW SHOWROOM A TOOL TO SERVE BUYERS, SAYS HUNTER HOMES CHIEF**

It's a rather unusual place for a home builder to open a showroom: a store front along University Drive, amidst chain restaurants and retail stores. Hunter Homes, which has a half-dozen residential communities throughout Madison County, has opened a central showroom at 1806 University, the former Business Interiors office furniture and equipment store.

Shawn Faiburn, president and chief operating officer of Hunter Homes, said the 15,000 square-foot headquarters and showroom is the only one of its kind in the state.

"There are a few builders across the country in some of the larger metropolitan areas that have a design studio," Faiburn said. He said it's a way to avoid the "bait-and-switch" scenarios that often happen when home buyers are choosing features for their new home. The center allows home buyers to personalize their homes, but they know up front which features are part of the home's base price and which are upgrades.

"We don't treat (the store) like a big profit center. It's a tool to close the sale," he said. "We try to stay very competitively priced. We have a staff of selection coordinators - they don't work on commission."

The showroom includes a mock bathroom, kitchen, garage and other features showing options available, including carpet and vinyl colors, kitchen appliances and door styles.

Faiburn said Hunter Homes is also assembling a sales team that will be based at the new site.

Hunter Homes has six subdivisions, with two expected to begin construction by fall and four more by the end of the year. Faiburn projects between 15 percent and 20 percent growth annually during the next several years.

Current conventional wisdom would say expected growth from Huntsville's base realignment and closure moves is driving the company's growth. But Faiburn said that's not the case.

"We haven't based a single decision or business strategy based on BRAC," he said. He explained the first-time buyer market - homes priced under \$200,000 - is underserved. Customers typically want more square footage than what's available in the existing home market for the price range, he said.

"Most used homes in that price range are about 20 years old, many of them don't have a garage," he said. "The dominant factor for the buyer is getting the most square footage for their money."

He noted that the average sales price for homes in Madison County is about \$150,000.

"No one is building homes in the meat of the market. There are more buyers in that market than in the \$250,000 range."

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