

Showcase for Accessibility

Country Home's newest Kansas location came with special requirements – and challenges.

by Kaija Wilkinson

Providing potential customers the opportunity to test ride a Country Home Elevator & Stair Lift elevator is vital to setting its products apart from the competition, says owner/founder Craig Jones. That's why, when he built his first fixed location in Brighton, Missouri, in 1998, including an array of vertical-transportation (VT) equipment was always part of the plan. That location, near the Ozarks, is the company's headquarters and features a stairwell elevator and a demo home elevator with a granite and wood interior designed by Jones. "Product differentiation is important in a confusing market of unequal products on the internet," Jones observes.

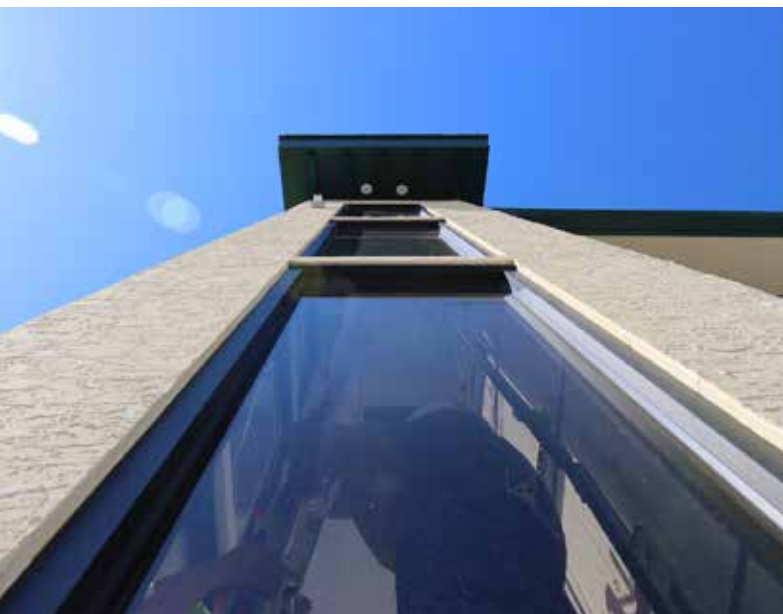
“ This was only a 1,000-ft² addition and remodel, but it was reviewed like it was a new Walmart Supercenter being plopped into a gated residential community.” — Country Home Elevator & Stair lift founder/owner Craig Jones

For Country Home's second location, in Rogers, Arkansas, Jones took a different approach, due to building codes making installing a home elevator in a commercial property a complicated process. So this time, Jones purchased a lake house in which to showcase a three-level elevator. Although it is a

house, the structure has a small office from which Jones works when he's in the area. Locations in Kansas City, Missouri; Hot Springs, Arkansas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and St. Louis followed. VT equipment on display throughout the company includes:

- ◆ Rogers, Arkansas: One elevator and two stairlifts
- ◆ Brighton, Missouri: One elevator, one dumbwaiter and three stairlifts
- ◆ St. Charles, Missouri: Three stairlifts and an elevator cab display (in leased space)

In May, Country Home opened its newest location in the Kansas City suburb of Olathe, Kansas. This location was the result of increased demand in the Kansas City area, where Jones has been working with homebuilders since 1990. Country Home's first demo elevators and lifts there were built in subdivisions' model homes, and were showcased during events such as the Parade of Homes.



Working in the hoistway at the new location



The completed Country Home Elevator & Stair lift location in Olathe, Kansas

With Kansas City area subdivisions filling up and people buying the homes where the demo units were installed, Jones realized he needed additional team members and a new place to showcase his VT products, and began looking for "the perfect location" in mid 2019. He found it when he happened upon a 3,000-ft², single-story building with the needed space for a showroom and warehouse. The location is 1904 East 123rd Street in Olathe, just down the street from a Bass Pro Shops store along

the busy Interstate 35 corridor into Johnson County. Jones thought the small, square structure could be easily converted into a two-story office space and showroom, but the pandemic and local building codes threw a monkey wrench into those plans. In most cities, Jones says, the building process relies on design professionals to prepare documents that meet “thousands” of revised International Building Code and International Code Council standards. “This was only a 1,000-ft² addition and remodel, but it was reviewed like it was a new Walmart Supercenter being plopped into a gated residential community,” Jones remembers.



Newly completed interior

After a couple of years, the local planning review board finally approved the design. It wasn't easy, though. Jones says:

“At nearly every step, we faced questions by yet another building official about the use of a residential elevator in a commercial building. The pandemic meant that every week became another week with nothing being done. We affectionately call our roofing company ‘Next Week Roofing.’”

Despite the bad timing and the bureaucratic red tape, Jones knew he could count on a couple of longtime Country Home partners to help the Olathe location become a reality. They are Prairie Village, Kansas-based architect Wolfgang Trost and Corey Brest and Bryon Sunday of Kansas City-based Accessibility Remodeling, which builds elevator hoistways for Country Home customers in the local area. Brest and Sunday came in about midway through the project. “They played a critical role in design completion and construction coordination,” Jones says. “They helped manage through all the issues every builder is dealing with right now, with supply chain and labor issues.”

Jones and Trost – who specializes in home design – have worked together on incorporating elevators into Trost-designed homes. “I provided him with my vision, he developed a few options, then we refined it into the final product that met all the required code elements,” Jones says. That vision included an elevator added to the property to showcase and highlight what Country Home is all about. The property now encompasses

4,000 ft² and features a Symmetry inline-gear-drive elevator with Symmetry Safety Speed doors and Savaria® Pro-Door swing hoistway doors that are power-operated, providing hassle-free, automatic access. With custom glass walls, the unit has a capacity of 1000 lb. It was installed in March, with a grand opening held in May. Jones also plans to add a Savaria cylindrical or octagon-shaped Vuelift as an additional demo unit.

Located in a spread-out light industrial park, Country Home's Olathe location might seem unlikely, even for a home elevator company. How will potential customers know it's there? Turns out, the customers will come to them, Jones says. “We have a solid base of homebuilders who ask to bring clients to see accessibility options, and we have a well-established local reputation,” says Jones, who adds targeted marketing had been planned to coincide with the grand opening.

Country Home currently has five employees in Olathe but, based on residential construction growth, plans to add more in coming months. Thirty additional employees are scattered throughout the seven states in which Country Home operates.

Jones says he is not stopping with Olathe. He's purchased property in St. Charles, Missouri, on which he aims to build a new facility from the ground up. “It will take on similar design elements [as Olathe], to feature the elevator hoistway and open-glass cab design,” he says. Country Home currently leases space in New Town, Missouri, approximately 5 mi. away from the newly purchased property. The plan is to complete that location in 2023. And, by this summer, a Country Home team member plans to install a demo elevator in his home in central Arkansas. 🌐