

# News from Home



**Home Repair Services**

Resources for Home Owners

**Spring 2009**

The Newsletter of Home Repair Services  
of Kent County, MI. Vol. 11, Issue 1  
[www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org)



Angelica and Alberto Tierrablanca are the proud winners of this year's Resourceful Homeowner Award. They received the award during a banquet at the Frederik Meijer Gardens on Feb. 19.

## Creativity & Courage: Couple Wins 2009 Resourceful Homeowner Award

When Angelica Tierrablanca heard the inspirational stories of creativity and success at last year's Resourceful Homeowner Celebration, she said to herself, "My husband can do this!"

Talk about determination – one year later, this feisty homeowner and her hard-working spouse were recognized as the 2009 Resourceful Homeowners of the Year.

**The projects the Tierrablanca**s took on

were not easy: Cleaning mold and scale from the basement and sealing it, then remodeling the kitchen and the bathroom. Each project brought its own special challenges.

For example, after removing a section of wall in the kitchen to open up that area, Alberto was suddenly faced with unexpected electrical conduits, plumbing and heating ducts that all had to be re-routed. But he managed to do it all himself.

**The Tierrablanca**s say the Builders' Abundance Store, along with the Tool Library, and helpful hints from Home Repair Services staff were all invaluable resources throughout the entire remodeling process. "We made many trips to the store during the kitchen phase," says Angelica.

On the fun side, though, she designed a unique pattern in the kitchen floor using ceramic tile cut and laid, of course, by Alberto.

**As for the bathroom**, the biggest obstacle was timing. "We have three boys, so it needed to get done very quickly," laughs Angelica. "I stayed up until five in the morning working on it," recalls Alberto, who managed to complete the job in an amazing two days.

The vanity, sink, toilet and blue slate tile for the bathroom floor – a great find – were all purchased at the Builders' Abundance Store, as was the crown molding which Alberto used as a header for the mirror, creating another custom look on a shoestring budget.

More than 300 people attended the annual awards banquet, which was held Thursday, February 19 at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park. The Tierrablanca's were rewarded with a \$500 gift certificate from Modern Hardware.

"It was a lot of work, but very much worth the effort," say the couple, who have lived in their northwest side home since 1996.

Other 2009 award finalists, who each received \$200 Modern Hardware gift certificates, included Todd and Sommar Hurt, Cu and Dieu-Hang Nguyen, and Damon and Paula Obiden. Congratulations to all! ■



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**View Our Online Video!**

"A Place You Can Trust" is a special video about the mission of Home Repair Services. You can view it online at [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org).

To learn more about our non-profit programs, please visit us online at [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org)

# Energy Conservation: High-Tech Tools Zero In On Heat Loss

*New Energy Efficiency Program Coming Soon!*

Dave Jacobs feels like a kid who's been handed his first set of real tools; he just can't wait to get going. Dave and Doug DeHaan will soon be certified as RESNET (Residential Energy Services Network) raters, which means they'll be qualified to use all the latest high tech equipment available for evaluating homes for energy efficiency.

In fact, it's the very same equipment used to assess new homes for the much-coveted Energy Star rating.

Two of the most advanced tools, the infrared camera and a blower door, are invaluable in determining where and how houses are losing heat. This heat loss is one of the biggest problems in older homes, says Dave. "Air leaks represent as much as 40% of heating loss. So finding and sealing those leaks is the highest priority in making older homes more energy efficient. We envision using this technology to guide our air sealing work."

While you might immediately think of windows and doors, "most leaks are actually found in attics and in basements (where the concrete meets the wood)," explains Dave. While the infrared camera captures heat loss spots with color-coding, the blower door can use smoke to show where air is coming in. Part of Dave and Doug's training was learning how to properly use this equipment.

Dave notes that do-it-yourselfers have wanted to make energy improvements in their homes for years but they've lacked the equipment to identify problems. "And it's expensive to hire a rater to come and do an assessment," he continues.

"We're thrilled that we'll soon be able to offer these services to our clients. Once we uncover where the problems are, they can make the fixes themselves."

Sealing the leaks isn't hard to do, but it can be a bit tedious and painstaking. "It's well worth the effort, though," adds Dave. "It can really reduce your heating bills. And the other great thing about this equipment

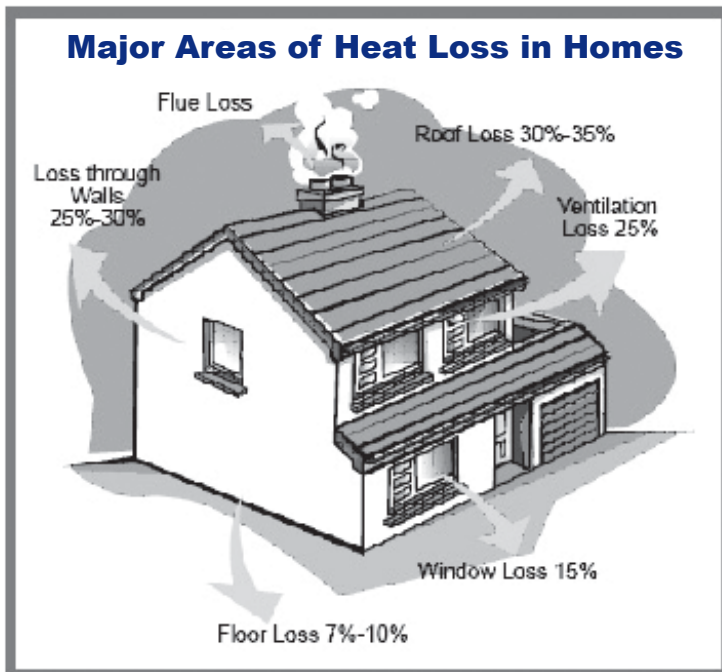
is that we can digitally measure your improvements with it afterward to make sure your seals are working."

Dave, who says he hasn't been this excited about working on old houses, "in a long, long time," is hoping the new Energy Efficiency program will be available to Home Repair Services clients by late spring.

"We're so pleased to be able to offer these types of services to lower-income homeowners. It's the best equipment out there, and now they'll have access to it just like families building new homes, but without the big expense." ■

## RESNET

*Residential Energy Services Network*



The diagram above shows where heat most often escapes the home. To learn more, visit [www.energysavers.gov](http://www.energysavers.gov). At right, Doug DeHaan calibrates the blower door before a test.



## Profile: People Who Make a Difference

### Judy Barnes, Executive VP and CEO, Home and Building Association



**Judy Barnes**, Executive VP and CEO of the Home and Building Association (HBA) of Greater Grand Rapids, has been described as a driving force behind that organization. “If you can think of something the HBA has done or accomplished in the past 25 years, she was probably behind it,” said past Association President Lee Kitson at a recent HBA tribute to Judy.

She is scheduled to retire from the HBA on June 30. Judy’s list of achievements over the years includes

growing the HBA to one of the 10 largest such organizations in the country; launching the long-running and highly successful Parade of Homes and helping start the HBA Foundation which provides scholarships and housing grants.

**She has also** been a long-time supporter of Home Repair Services, starting when she first learned about the organization back in the 1980s.

“Thanks to her enthusiasm, the HBA kind of ‘adopted’ us, and it’s been a wonderful relationship ever since,” says Executive Director Dave Jacobs.

**Judy is responsible** for one Home Repair Services’ most successful programs: the annual Community Repair Day. “She grabbed that idea and ran with it,” says Dave. “In fact, she named it.” And since it began in 1992, hundreds of HBA members have given of their time and talents each year to help the less fortunate.

“I think Community Repair Day is a fabulous example of what we can do together to help people in need,” says Judy. “We’re kindred spirits in terms of giving back; Home Repair Services has a real heart for the community, and so do we.”

**Dave says Judy’s contributions** go far beyond Community Repair Day. “I’ve learned so much from Judy over the years. Beyond the work itself, she is an absolute master in terms of organizing

large groups of people and marketing volunteer events. We are just so grateful for all that she and the HBA have done for us and continue to do, even though they’re going through some hard times themselves right now.”

It works both ways, says Judy. “A number of HRS staff members have served on HBA committees, and their passion keeps us inspired,” she says. “We’re happy to give time to help them achieve their goals.” ■

*“If you can think of something the HBA has done or accomplished in the past 25 years, she was probably behind it.”*

– Lee Kitson, Former HBA President

## New Matching Grant Programs Spur Support from Local Donors

The Steelcase Foundation and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation have stepped in to fund matching grants that encourage sustained support for Home Repair Services programs.

**A two-year, \$30,000** Steelcase Foundation grant will match contributions at the \$1,000 “Front Door Friends” leadership giving level. Home Repair Services will receive \$1 for every dollar donated in 2009 and \$1 for every two dollars donated in 2010. Matching grants apply to contributions by new Front Door Friends and those who contributed at that level prior to 2008.

The \$25,000 Grand Rapids Community Foundation grant will match \$1 for every two dollars contributed through 2009 to support foreclosure intervention. This grant will focus on maintaining support from businesses with a direct stake in the foreclosure crisis.

“These grants encourage our supporters to renew or increase their contributions to help us capitalize on

the matching funds from these foundations” says Stan Greene, Home Repair Services Resource Development Manager. “In the case of foreclosure intervention, we’re facing a problem that’s affecting everyone. This is a great way for financial institutions, title companies, law firms, and other businesses related to the housing market to get involved and make a real difference.”

**As Laurie Craft**, program director at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, said recently, “This is a crisis that’s not easing up, and we’re hoping that our grant will encourage additional community buy-in and support for foreclosure prevention programs. We think Home Repair Services is uniquely well-qualified to offer these types of programs. So we’re very committed to their goal of strengthening homeownership in the community, which certainly fits with our mission as well.”

For more information, please call Stan Greene of Home Repair Services at **(616) 241-2601**, ext. 223. ■

# On the Front Lines of the Foreclosure Crisis:

## Our Financial Counselors See an Unprecedented Increase in Caseload and Need

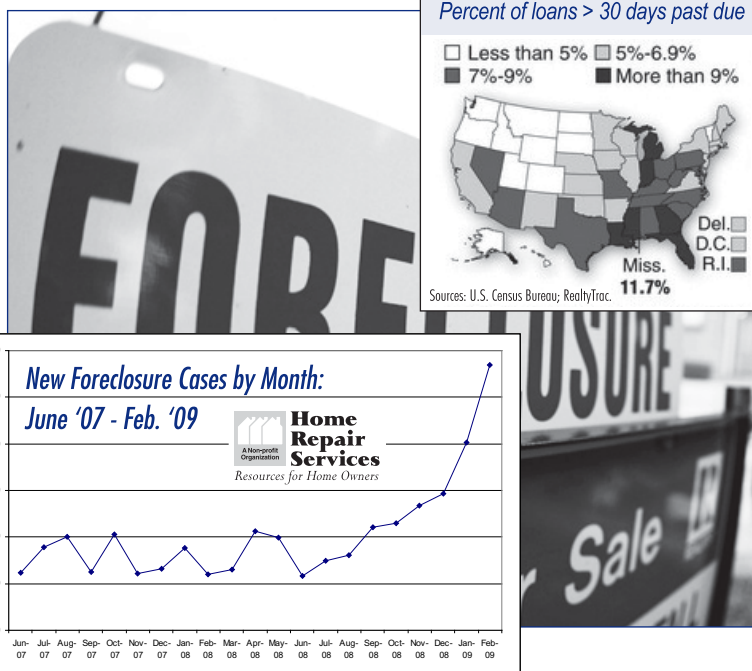
**Home Repair Services** offers financial counseling for homeowners throughout Kent County seeking to avoid foreclosure. And while the Financial Counseling staff is being pushed to the limits, they are also rising to the occasion says Financial Counseling Manager Tracie Coffman.

“We are dealing with unprecedented increases in the number of cases we’re handling right now,” says Tracie. “Our counselors are putting in extra hours and doing whatever it takes to serve those who come to us with a need. The dedication they’re showing is extremely commendable.”

Indeed, in 2001, there was one financial counselor on staff who handled approximately 125 cases. In 2008 five counselors handled more than 1,100 cases, a number that’s on pace to increase to 2,700 in 2009. Furthermore, in 2001 it took counselors 20 hours to resolve a case; they’ve seen that figure rise dramatically during the past year.

That’s because in addition to the caseload volume, there’s the ongoing challenge of keeping up with the complex changes in the mortgage world: In regulations, programs, guidelines, funding – even forms and paperwork.

“One company does it one way, another a different way, and what they both did last month may completely change this month,” says Tracie.



situation is and how the person arrived there. The goal, of course, is helping homeowners find a way to avoid foreclosure – both now and in the future.

One of the most important teaching steps is having the client there when the counselor calls the mortgage company. “By the time they come to us, our clients may be very frustrated; they

don’t understand the lingo, they don’t know what department to talk to, they don’t even know what questions to ask,” says Chantil.

“When they hear us talking, they’ll often say, ‘Wow, you got more information than I ever did!’ But that’s because we know who to talk to and what to ask. And that

“That sometimes means we have to start all over on cases, or at least take two steps back,” says Financial Counselor Chantil Skinner, adding that she and her fellow counselors are committed to see these cases through, even as their files “grow thicker and thicker.”

**Patience, to be sure, is a necessary** virtue. So is being a good teacher, notes Chantil. “Our job is to help our clients find the solution for themselves,” she emphasizes.

“We’re a resource, but we aren’t the solution. So it’s not a case of, ‘Here, fix this.’ We’re not here to take your problem; we’re here to help you resolve your problem.”

That begins with a review of a client’s income, budget and current financial status to determine what the current

*“By the time they come to us, our clients may be very frustrated. they don’t understand the lingo... or what questions to ask.”*

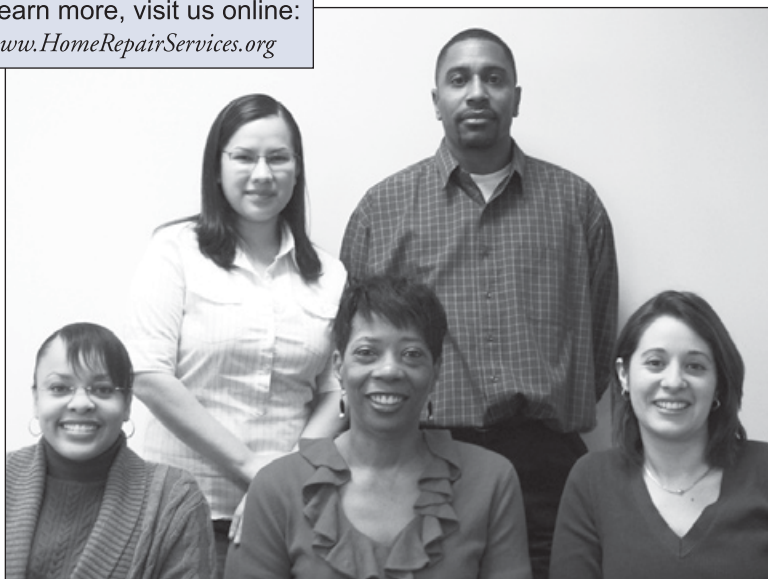
– Chantil Skinner, Financial Counselor

teaches them how to do it themselves.”

The financial counselors are a big help to each other, too, observes Tracie. “There’s a lot of communication and camaraderie involved. They all share information and support one another, and that’s crucial in times like these.”

In spite of the hardships, Chantil says the work is very satisfying, noting a recent study that shows 60% percent of Home Repair Services clients who avoid foreclosure are still current with their mortgages one year later. “It’s rewarding to us to know we didn’t just fix a problem; we helped them learn how to fix it themselves.” ■

To learn more, visit us online:  
[www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org)



Financial Counselors at Home Repair Services have helped hundreds of local families avoid foreclosure during the last 12 months. Pictured here are (front row, left to right) Chantil Skinner, Gwendolyn Miller and Tracie Coffman and (back row, left to right) Leticia Perez and Darrin Lucas.



*David Scheidel, Carpentry Supervisor at Home Repair Services, recently built his 500th wheelchair ramp in Kent County. His strong work ethic and personal commitment are an inspiration to everyone! If you are looking for a way to give back to our community, consider volunteering at Home Repair Services. For details, see the blue box below or call (616) 241-2601.*



## 500 Wheelchair Ramps!

### *David Scheidel Reaches a Milestone*

A significant milestone was achieved recently when Carpentry Supervisor David Scheidel built his 500th wheelchair ramp. And while that represents a lot of wood and spindles, what's most important are those who benefit from the effort. Thanks to David's work, people who might otherwise be homebound have become more independent and now enjoy an improved quality of life.

Bob Hengeveld,  
Repair Team

Manager, says David is perfectly suited to the job. "He's very detail-oriented; he makes sure every aspect is covered, whether it's dealing with an inspector

for a building permit or laying out a challenging design. He's particular about doing things right – and that's exactly the kind of person that's needed."

**David says his role** is an extremely satisfying one. "It's nice to have contact with people who need the ramps. You'll see them anxiously looking out the window – maybe they've been cooped up awhile and this will be the first chance they've had to get outside. They're so appreciative."

David notes that his success wouldn't be possible without the help of committed volunteers, some of whom have been involved for years. "We've been very fortunate to have some dedicated people who do a great job. I get it to a certain point and then they take over, digging the post holes, putting in the spindles and so on. They provide a very valuable service that helps keep our costs down."

**Recent retirements** have thinned the ranks of those volunteers, however, so the program is in need of more people to help out. (Please see box at left.) Not only is the work rewarding, says Bob, "there's a lot of camaraderie involved and everyone has a good time working together."

Far from being ready to rest on his laurels, David looks forward to continuing to help people in need. "Seeing the looks on the faces of the people we help really means a lot." ■



*David celebrates his milestone with his mother, Pat (left) and wife, Beth.*

## Volunteers Are Needed!

If you're handy with a hammer, enjoy working outdoors, and are looking for ways to give back to the community, please consider volunteering to build wheelchair ramps for those in need. The work, which consists primarily of digging, sawing, cutting, and hammering, may also require some experience with power tools.

"It's a very satisfying way to volunteer," says David Scheidel, Home Repair Services Carpentry Supervisor. "The projects are usually completed within a couple of days, so you get the immediate gratification of seeing the job through to the end. And when you watch a person who's been homebound for awhile roll down that ramp for the first time, it's pretty special."

**For more information** on volunteering, please contact Judy Jordan at (616) 241-2601, extension 231. ■

**Do you have surplus or lightly used building materials?** Call Home Repair Services! We'll send a truck directly to your site to pick it – for free. It's easy! Just call (616) 241-2601 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to arrange a pick-up. Or you may visit us online at: [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org). Your donations are also tax-deductible! ■

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Resources for Home Owners

1100 S. Division Ave.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49507-1024

## Save the Date! *Making It Home Benefit Auction Set for October 15, 2009*

Mark your calendar now for the 6th Annual Making It Home benefit auction, which will take place on Thursday, October 15, 2009 at Home Repair Services' headquarters, 1100 S. Division Ave. in Grand Rapids. Doors will open at 6:00 p.m.

This year's auction will feature:

- Wonderful food from San Chez – a Tapas Bistro
- An open bar provided by Art of the Table
- More than 100 live and silent auction items
- The raffle drawing for the winner of a 2005 Harley Davidson Deluxe Classic Motorcycle

### Interested in donating a unique item for the auction?

One-of-a-kind experiences, vacation packages and tickets for special events are always popular. Please call Jodie Rykse at (616) 241-2601, ext. 225, or send her an e-mail at [jrykse@homerepairservices.org](mailto:jrykse@homerepairservices.org) for more information on how you can help make this the best auction ever.

Visit [www.homerepairservices.org/mih.php](http://www.homerepairservices.org/mih.php) for more information or call (616) 241-2601. **See you there!**



This newsletter is a publication of

Home Repair Services of Kent County, Inc.

1100 S. Division Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49507.

Phone: (616) 241-2601. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization; all contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Your questions and suggestions are welcome.

[www.HomeRepairsServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairsServices.org)



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# Making It Home

Benefit Auction