

# News from Home



**Home Repair Services**  
A Non-profit Organization

Resources for Home Owners

**Fall 2011**

The Newsletter of Home Repair Services  
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[www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org)

## Cold Busters! Repair Team Installs 95 Furnaces

*Your Furnace Fund Donations Help Lower-Income Families Stay Warm*



Repair Program Manager Bob Hengeveld (left) and Doré Westra (right) get ready for another furnace repair job in Kent County. Bottom right: Pro-Tech Heating & Cooling replaces a furnace for a homeowner in northwest Grand Rapids.

Imagine that you're inside your home and it's freezing cold. Your furnace is unsafe and so old it's beyond repair – and you don't have the money to replace it. Where do you turn for help?

Between October 2010 and October 2011, Home Repair Services completed 227 furnace repairs and replaced 95 furnaces for lower-income homeowners whose furnaces had stopped working.

The reasons for a furnace not working are many and the financial resources to fix it are few, says Bob Hengeveld, repair program manager. "A client asks us to look at a minor furnace repair, and we find that it's leaking carbon monoxide or is so old they can't get parts for it anymore. The homeowner's initial reaction is shock, and then it's 'What do we do now?'"

Home Repair Services helps the homeowner apply for funding that day, seeking help through the Department of Human Services, the Area Agency

on Aging or other means. It can take two weeks to get approval and Bob says there are always people who don't qualify and have nowhere else to turn.

"I've worked here since 1980 and every year there have been families with no funding options," Bob says. "We really rely on donors to support these furnace repairs and replacements."

**A typical furnace replacement** runs about \$2,300 and repairs average \$100. Home Repair Services seeks to install furnaces with efficiency ratings of at least 95 percent to save homeowners money on their heating bills. But even with discounts provided by the furnace supplier, replacement costs are high.

"I'm always searching for furnaces that would give Home Repair Services a better price with a better warranty," says Andy Purvins of Pro-Tech Heating & Cooling, a contractor with Home Repair Services. "But it comes down to finding the money so more people will be able to stay warm this winter."

"I remember one house where I knocked on the door and heard somebody holler 'Come in,'" Andy relates. "I opened the door and there was an elderly lady in a hospital bed in her living room. She couldn't get out of bed and her house was cold."

Bob says he's seen situations in which desperate homeowners try to keep themselves and their children warm or their water pipes from freezing by running the stove, oven or space heaters; a dangerous situation that can result in a fire or asphyxiation.

"Timing gets critical in the dead of winter," Bob says. "A donation of the cost of a furnace or even a smaller amount for our furnace fund will help keep a family warm and safe this winter."

To donate, please contact Stan Greene at (616) 241-2601, ext. 223 or visit [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org). ■



### Inside This Issue...

Energy Conservation Progress.....	2
People Who Make a Difference....	3
Coaching for Success .....	3
Auction Spotlight .....	4
20th Community Repair Day.....	5
Our Thanksgiving Wish List.....	6
Coming Soon: RHC 2012.....	6

(Right) Tim Swinkels uses spray foam insulation to seal an attic. (Far right) Doug DeHaan conducts a blower door test to check for air leaks. To learn about our Air Sealing program, call 241-2601 or visit us online at [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org).



## Progress Update: Energy Conservation Program Reaps Benefits for Lower-Income Homeowners and the Environment

**Most air leaks in homes** don't come from the windows or doors, so sealing them against winter's frigid fingers can be a waste of money and time. *Surprised?*

Todd Calhoun, Home Repair Services air sealing program coordinator, has performed blower door air leakage tests on dozens of homes. Todd uses a smoke pencil and an infrared camera to locate the spots where air leaks lurk – around chimneys in basements, the soffits over kitchen cabinets and bathtubs, where electrical conduits enter attics and inside the walls of old houses with balloon framing. He notes each spot, then spends hours crawling around in dirty attics and basements to seal the leaks – often in very close quarters.

**Balloon framing**, says Todd, is one of the biggest culprits in houses built before 1930. As warm air rises, it pulls heat out of basements, up the cavity between the outside and inside walls, into the attic and out the vents. This loss of warm air makes interior walls cold. In the summer, the process reverses, pulling hot, humid air into the house, making it difficult and costly to cool.

“Air Sealing can run about \$1,000 and is not an investment that people who live hand-to-mouth are likely to make,” says Dave Jacobs, Home Repair Services executive director. “Some energy improvements, like replacing the furnace, will result in greater savings per year. But if we don't invest in plugging the air leaks, those new furnaces will continue to blow the air they paid to heat out the holes in the attic and basement.”

**Over the life of the home**, the savings from plugging those air leaks can total up to \$4,000.

Home Repair Services' Air Sealing Program covers the costs of an energy audit, blower door test and air sealing for lower-income homeowners who want the service. After the leaks are sealed, a second blower door test reveals the results.

“We're averaging an 18 percent reduction in air infiltration,” says Todd. “But I've seen as high as 40 percent. Homeowners who don't seal their houses are paying to heat and cool them, but they aren't getting the full benefit from the money they spend. On top of that, the wasted energy is adversely affecting the environment.”

“**Home Repair Services is spending** the time and money to make the long-term investment these lower-income homeowners can't make,” Dave adds. “But that investment should permanently stop the waste of energy. And that's something that will benefit the community for years to come.”

If you'd like to help support this vital energy conservation work, please contact Stan Greene at 616-241-2601, extension 223 or visit [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org). ■



### Why Home Repair Services Invests in Air Sealing

- It's hard, dirty, expensive work – many homeowners are not able to do it themselves.
- It maximizes the return on other energy-saving measures.
- It's a long-term investment. Benefits from air sealing will last for as long as a house stands.
- At today's prices for natural gas, air sealing will save up to \$4,000 over the life of a typical home.

## People Who Make a Difference: **Dick Lower**



**Dick Lower jokes** that in his 30 years as a brick mason he gathered a lot of useless knowledge. But to Home Repair Services clients, his knowledge is some of the most useful information they can get – the kind that helps them remodel their homes and tackle do-it-yourself repairs they’ve never tried before.

Since 2004, Dick has done a variety of jobs for Home Repair Services: driving the truck to pick up donations,

teaching Fix-it School classes, and being the go-to guy for countless Builders’ Abundance Store clients.

“**I learned by watching other tradesmen** on building projects, so I can help with a lot of things,” Dick says. “If a customer wants to know how to fix a leaky faucet, I take them back to where we have a bunch of used sinks and find a faucet similar to theirs. I show them how to take the faucet apart to see what part needs to be replaced. I also help customers figure out what kind of paint to use or how to figure square footage.”

Dick doesn’t speak Spanish, but when a Spanish-speaking client needs help, he gets another client to translate, so he ends up teaching two customers at once.

“**Dick has a confidence about what he does** because he has the knowledge and experience,” says BJ Jordan, self-help program manager. “He’s able to communicate the tricks of the trade in a down-to-earth manner so our do-it-yourselfers can understand. They come in looking for Dick because they know he’ll give them the information they need.”

BJ adds that Dick works three days a week, and then spends another day each week volunteering with the team that builds wheelchair ramps.

**Dick sums up his philosophy with a smile.** “You don’t come to work at a nonprofit to make a lot of money. You come here because you want to help people.” ■

## **Coaching for Success:** *Despite Loss in Funding, DIY Program Builds on New Focus to Help Lower-Income Homeowners Tackle Big Jobs*

**Steve Sielaff has only been a coach** in the Homeowner Engaged Remodeling program for a couple of months, but he’s already saying it’s one of the most rewarding things he’s ever done.

Steve, a retired builder and a teacher for the Fix-it School, is busy helping lower-income homeowners gut and rebuild their kitchens and bathrooms.

“I’ve been working with a lady who had no idea how to do anything electrical,” Steve says. “Now she can change a plug, change a switch, install a light fixture and do plastering to patch holes. Home Repair Services provides a fantastic opportunity for people to use our building talents to help others.”

**In the aftermath of losing** \$250,000 in federal funding for do-it-yourself programs, Home Repair Services narrowed the focus of those programs to provide help to lower-income homeowners who want to

complete major remodeling projects, like kitchens and bathrooms. That means having the right supplies on hand in Builders’ Abundance and experienced coaches who can help guide the work.

“**What we need right now** are men and women who have a working knowledge of the building trades or home improvement projects,” says BJ Jordan, self-help program manager. “They don’t have to be licensed. It could just be someone who has worked on their own house for years and can pass their knowledge along.”

**Coaches might help** with planning, design, installation and/or finishing. The typical time commitment ranges from 15 to 30 hours per project. “Coaches teach a task like installing an electrical outlet and then do enough hands-on work to get the homeowner started,” BJ says. “And the coach isn’t alone; they have our carpenters and staff here to

answer any questions they can’t answer themselves.”

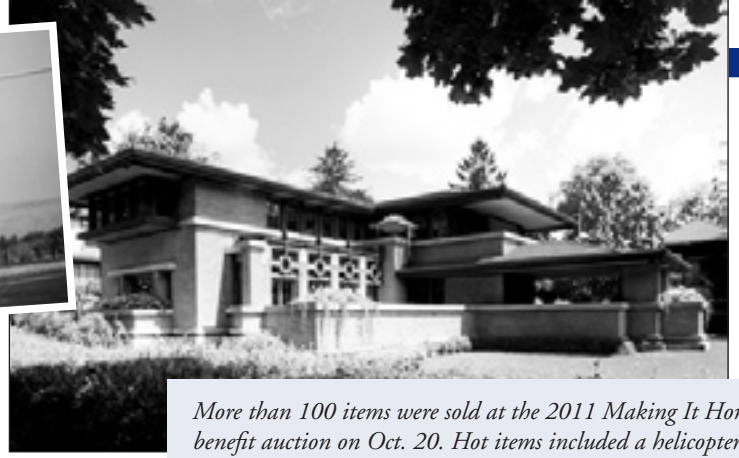
To become a coach, please call BJ Jordan at (616) 241-2601, ext. 226. ■



*Steve Sielaff and BJ Jordan help turn remodeling dreams into reality. To learn more about this program, call 241-2601.*



## Making It Home Benefit Auction



More than 100 items were sold at the 2011 Making It Home benefit auction on Oct. 20. Hot items included a helicopter tour of Grand Rapids and dinner for 10 at the Meyer May House. To learn more about the event, visit [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org)

## 2011 Benefit Auction Another Smash Hit!

### Guests & Sponsors Donate to Benefit Home Repair Services Programs

The energy in the room was electric, filled with good-natured competition during a festive and fun 2011 Making It Home auction. As the live auction revved up, rapid-fire bidding commenced over the night's hottest selling items: dinner for 10 at the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Meyer May House, a dinner for eight prepared by Chef Tommy Fitzgerald and a Celebration! Cinema VIP Pass for a movie a day for a year.

A transformed Builders' Abundance store buzzed with activity the evening of Oct. 20 as friends of Home Repair Services roamed through specialty "rooms" that included Child's Play, Workshop, Great Outdoors, Master Bedroom and Executive Office.

The rooms showcased 174 donated items that lured guests into a flurry of bidding throughout the evening. Items up for bid included a Grand Haven bed & breakfast getaway, a garden shed built by Home Repair Services Fix-it School participants and a helicopter ride over Grand Rapids.

"This year we thought out of the box a bit and came up with packages of unusual or different experiences," says Events Coordinator Coleen Downey. "People bid online prior to the auction and then came to the event and placed bids via our computer stations, with their mobile phones or with iPads. We had some really big bids come in."

The auction raised some \$59,000 for Home Repair Services' emergency

home repairs, foreclosure intervention and do-it-yourself assistance for Kent County's lower-income homeowners – support that is particularly important this year in the wake of a \$250,000 reduction in government funding for do-it-yourself programs.

Honorary hosts Bruce and Candace Matthews, Ben and Betty Brinks, and Steve and Molly Parker welcomed guests to a tasty feast by San Chez A Tapas Bistro, a selection of specialty beers, wines and soft drinks from Art of the Table, and delectable cupcakes by Desserts by Lori.

"*Making It Home* is as much about raising friends as it is raising funds," says Stan Greene, resource development manager. "Once again, the evening provided a chance for us to meet new people and tell the story of how our staff and volunteers equip and empower lower-income homeowners. None of it would have been possible without the generous underwriting of our sponsors, who provided support totaling \$37,500."

A number of "second chance" items and packages are available for bidding until November 30 on the Home Repair Services website at [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org). Simply go to the site and select Second Chance Auction from the Events tab to register and enter bids.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of the 2011 Making It Home Auction! ■

### 2011 Auction Sponsors

#### Rooftop Benefactors

(Gifts of \$5,000 or more)

James and Jane Welch Foundation  
Northern Cross Foundation



Take His Hand Foundation

#### Fireplace Leaders

(Gifts of \$2,500 or more)

Anonymous  
Chemical Bank  
Eikenhout, Inc.  
RoMan Manufacturing  
San Chez - A Tapas Bistro

#### Brick & Mortar Friends

(Gifts of \$1,000 or more)

Ben & Betty Brinks  
Elaine Carr Design  
Fence Consultants of West Michigan  
Gumina's Flowers  
Stan & Norma Sterk/Sterk & Company PC CPA  
Steelcase  
United Bank

#### Blueprint Supporters

(Gifts of \$500 or more)

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The Lykins Law Firm, PLC

# Community Repair Day Celebrates 20 Years

## *Volunteers Build 20 Wheelchair Ramps - One for Each Year!*

The leap from building 12 wheelchair ramps on a typical Community Repair Day to building 20 in 2011 was huge. Volunteer hours, materials and staff hours nearly doubled. But the Home and Building Association of Greater Grand Rapids (HBA) was determined to mark the 20th year of Community Repair Day with a unique commitment.

The HBA approached Home Repair Services in 1992 with the desire to volunteer its members' talents to help people in need. Each year since, HBA members have donated the materials, labor and tools to build an average of 12 wheelchair ramps during a one-day blitz. This year, even though the goal was 20 ramps, "the HBA blew right past that and built 22!" says Dave Jacobs, Home Repair Services executive director.

"Everyone made it happen," Dave continues. "These builders, who make their living in an industry that has been badly beaten up, and their association, which has many fewer members than it used to have, are still absolutely committed to making this contribution. We're so grateful."

The key was to start building ramps in the early summer. Efforts this year included three first-time crews: the HBA board, the Home Repair Services board and the Home Repair Services staff.

**Disability Advocates** of Kent County selected the ramp recipients and site inspections were completed. Then Home Repair Services custom designed each ramp and sent carpenters and volunteers to dig postholes and set the posts, preparing sites throughout the summer for Community Repair Day crews.

In all, 136 volunteers on 24 crews built 22 ramps and completed an electrical upgrade and a bathroom modification. Final touch-up work for the 22nd ramp was completed Oct. 5.

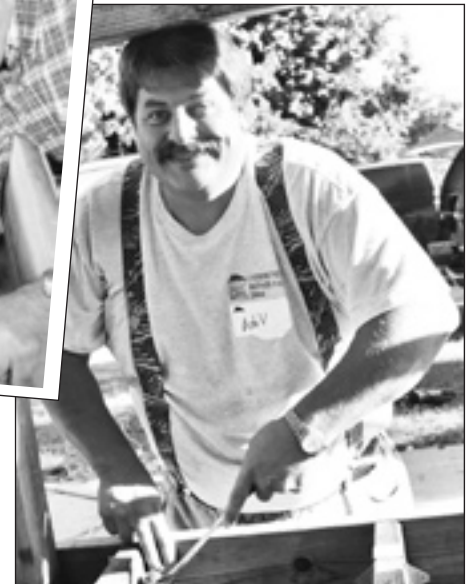
"These builders come back year after year," says Mike Zamarron,



*(Above) Members of the HBA board built one of this year's ramps. (Below left) Darin Estep of the Home Repair Services board made volunteering a family affair. (Below right) A younger Bob Vugteveen during the 2005 Community Repair Day. Vugteveen Builders has participated in all 20 Community Repair Days!*

Home Repair Services product procurement specialist and Community Repair Day coordinator. "The ramps mean freedom for disabled people who can't get outside their homes without help. They're so happy to be able to go in and out of their houses on their own -- they don't have to be carried or be a burden to others or have to ask for help. It's a big thing."

"We have such a generous membership group," notes Emily Siebert, HBA executive officer. "This year we had more builders involved and others who haven't been able to be involved for a while. And the lumberyards came to the table with nearly twice the supplies they've donated in the past. Community Repair Day is a bright spot in an industry that isn't always so bright right now. It was an incredible effort on everyone's part." ■



### **All Told: 20 Years of Community Repair Day**

- \$326,982 of Materials Donated
- 567 Jobs Completed
- 212 Wheelchair Ramps Built
- 12,101 Total Volunteer Hours

To learn more, or sign up to volunteer at next year's event, please call us at **(616) 241-2601**.

# News from Home



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## Thanksgiving Wish List

The annual Thanksgiving Wishes program, sponsored by The Grand Rapids Press and Heart of West Michigan United Way, solicits donations of cash, goods and services to help people in need. Home Repair Services has a history of requests being fulfilled through the program, underwriting critical repairs for lower-income families throughout Kent County.

Home Repair Services' 2011 wishes, in the home improvement category, will appear in the November 24th edition of The Grand Rapids Press. Your contributions will help make the holidays a little brighter for the families we serve. Thank you for your generosity!

CHECK THE GRAND RAPIDS  
PRESS ON NOV. 24,  
THANKSGIVING DAY!



## Save the Date!

Mark your calendars now for Thursday, Feb. 23, 2012, which is the date of our next "Resourceful Homeowner Celebration" at Frederik Meijer Gardens. The festivities begin at 6 p.m. To learn more, or to become a sponsor for this unique event, please call (616) 241-2601.



Our mission is to build successful, sustained homeownership for lower-income families, thereby strengthening neighborhoods and the community.

This newsletter is a publication of Home Repair Services of Kent County, Inc. 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 always welcome.

**Address:** 1100 S. Division Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49507  
**Phone:** (616) 241-2601  
**Website:** [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org)