

# News from Home



**Home  
Repair  
Services**

Resources for Home Owners

**Spring 2011**

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

## A Brand New Look at “Do It Yourself”

*Home Repair Services Responds to Funding Cuts with New Program*



A new program called “Homeowner Engaged Remodeling” offers low-income homeowners one-on-one instruction right in their homes.

**In the face of loss,** some organizations cut programs and services. But eighteen months ago, Home Repair Services considered the prospect of reduced government funding and began work on a contingency plan.

That early planning paid off. The organization learned late last year of the loss of \$140,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds, coupled with yet another decline in donations of building materials for the Builders’ Abundance Store. In response, Homeowner Engaged Remodeling launched in February – a program designed to serve lower-

income homeowners even better despite diminished resources.

**Homeowner Engaged Remodeling** aligns expertise and support to work one-on-one with 30 or 40 homeowners a year who are committed to major remodeling projects.

“The benefits of Homeowner Engaged Remodeling come in the opportunity for the homeowner to have one-on-one instruction right in their home,” says BJ Jordan, self-help program manager.

**The focus on supporting well**

planned projects extends to the active solicitation of key product donations. Emphasis on five product categories – flooring, doors, windows, paint and cabinets – ensures the most important supplies are available for major remodeling projects.

“In the past, we wanted our clients to think of Builders’ Abundance as a builder’s supply store. But our objective is not to sell a certain amount of supplies each year; our objective is to stimulate a certain number of new kitchens and baths done by lower income homeowners,” says Executive Director Dave Jacobs.

**The realignment of resources** includes closing the store on Mondays and opening at 11:00 a.m., instead of 9:00 a.m., on the remaining weekdays. Besides cutting costs, the change allows the store to align itself with client needs: Shoppers enjoy extended hours, until 7:00 p.m., on Wednesdays. The Store is also open from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays so clients attending Saturday Fix-it School classes can pick up materials before heading home.

The new program isn’t for everyone, says Dave. It depends on the client’s willingness to work on a project that takes a lot of time and attention.

**“We can help those homeowners** who are ready to engage,” Dave says. “Homeowner Engaged Remodeling” underscores an important paradigm shift, a new method that supports do-it-yourselfers in new ways. We’re excited about being able to point to the new bathrooms and kitchens we helped lower-income homeowners remodel.” ■

### Materials Needed!

Our Builders’ Abundance store needs donations of new or gently used building materials for our new Homeowner Engaged Remodeling program:

- Kitchen and bathroom cabinets
- Windows
- Doors
- Flooring
- Light fixtures

If you have materials to donate, please call (616) 241-2601.

## A Day in the Life of the Repair Team: *Plumber Phil McConahy*

In the busy-ness of our day-to-day lives, how many of us stop to think that getting a new toilet could be life changing?

Phil McConahy, a plumber on Home Repair Services' Repair Team, sees those life-changing moments happen nearly every day.

"Many of our clients are in situations they haven't been in before because they've lost mobility," Phil says. "Some people can't lift their legs over the side of the bathtub, or they use walkers or are in wheelchairs. We give them back some independence by installing grab bars and the taller handicap toilets. It makes them real happy."

**Phil says there's no such thing** as a typical work day for him, but if there was, it might include visiting five or six homes to do repairs or assess a future job; trips to a supply store for whatever he doesn't have in his van; writing up receipts, estimates and repair logs, and trying to make sure he leaves clients with smiles on their faces. On other days, he might travel to the far corners of the county to install a new showerhead, fix a leaking pipe in a basement or unclog a kitchen drain.

**"Some people have rags tied around a faucet** to try to keep it from leaking," Phil says. "Especially the older clients who grew up in the depression era when you never threw anything out."

In addition to Phil, the seven-person team consists of electricians, roofers, furnace repairmen and carpenters. The team sees some 90 clients in a week, repairing furnaces, replacing light fixtures, fixing roofs, building wheelchair ramps and repairing plumbing.

"Besides doing the work they collect all the co-pays, they have to document the repairs in detail and keep the paperwork straight and they have to keep in mind what the priority jobs



*Plumber Phil McConahy heads out on another job. Many clients who request help from the Repair Team are elderly or disabled. Even the most basic repairs can present a financial challenge.*

are for that day," says Bob Hengeveld, repair team manager. "They have to fit that all in with runs to supply houses. At the end of the day they come back into the office to submit the paperwork and they call the clients they're going to see the next day."

**Bob says the job isn't a fit for just anyone.**

"These are often old houses, the people are not in the best circumstances and these are not easy repairs," he says.

"We fill a void for clients," Phil says. "We do work for them that they couldn't afford to have done by other contractors. And we're making life more enjoyable." ■



## Facts & Figures

Sometimes numbers speak louder than words. In the 12-month period ending March 31, 2011, the Repair Team completed a total of **1,998 jobs**. These included:

- 731 plumbing and drain repairs
- 317 furnace repairs or replacements
- 232 roof repairs
- 180 electrical repairs
- 129 home access modifications (wheelchair ramps, grab bars, bathroom modifications)
- 1,167 of these jobs were completed for seniors



*Each year, hundreds of lower-income homeowners call the Home Repair Services Repair Team for emergency help. Your support of Home Repair Services makes this vital service possible. We are deeply grateful.*

# People Who Make a Difference: **Abe DeVries**

Seventeen years ago, Abe DeVries heard a sermon about the importance of serving others and picked up a flyer at his church that listed places where people could get involved. Since that time, Abe has been what Executive Director Dave Jacobs calls “Home Repair Services’ most prolific supporter.”

“I’m very grateful that he likes to talk about Home Repair Services,” Dave says. “He has some very affluent friends, and there are plaques on our wall recognizing major contributions that were made because Abe approached people he knew. One of the reasons Home Repair Services is on solid ground financially is because Abe introduced us to people who continue to make major contributions.”

**Abe started out volunteering** for small electrical repair jobs (and loves to tell about being showered with dead bugs the first time he replaced a ceiling light fixture). Then he became the Repair Team’s eyes and ears, pre-inspecting client repair jobs. When Home Repair Services was ready to move into its then-new location in the former Mulvihill Olds building – a move Abe supported and for which he helped raise the \$3M needed for renovations – Abe vacuumed the floors.

**He also uses his 20-plus years of experience** as an automobile salesman for Home Repair Services’ benefit. “He gets us better deals than we could get on our own,” says Dave. “We haven’t purchased a truck in the last 10 years without Abe’s help.”

After six years on the board, term limits meant Abe had to step down. In 2010, the board voted to make Abe its first-ever emeritus member. Now he attends meetings whenever his health allows. While this former miner, wrestler and hockey player has lost some of his physical strength, that hasn’t diminished his faith in God, though.

“Wherever he goes he infects those around him with that faith,” Dave says. “We’re so grateful for everything Abe has done for us.” **Thank you, Abe. ■**



## **Online Rewards:** *New Website, Facebook Get Results*



**In today’s world of technology** at our fingertips, an appealing online presence is an essential part of every organization’s communication portfolio. Home Repair Services has tapped into that trend with a redesigned website and a Facebook page that have helped the organization step onto a global stage.

**The redesigned website** launched in October 2009 and continues to evolve as a dynamic interactive portal that allows users to download volunteer applications, make online donations

through PayPal, find out about events and upcoming classes and read archived newsletters and annual reports. A slide show on the home page keeps folks updated with current information, and a contact form encourages users to connect with us directly.

**“We’re getting more interaction** with clients who contact us to describe their situation and how we might be able to help them, and we’re hearing from more individuals and organizations that are looking for ways to connect and volunteer,” says Stan Greene, Home Repair Services’ resource development manager. “Friends on our Facebook page are sharing their excitement about their volunteer experiences, and we’re sharing information about events and classes to keep people informed.”

Being accessible 24/7 from anywhere in the world has had unexpected results. Here are some notable examples of the rewards we’re reaping today:

- **The founder** of *EnergyFlair.com* found Home Repair Services’ website and edited a series of energy conservation videos for online viewing.
- **Cabot Creamery Cooperative** of Vermont donated to the 2010 “Making It Home” auction at the request of their regional sales executive who had learned about the event from the website.
- **On Google, Yahoo and Bing**, Home Repair Services’ website is the first non-advertising result from a search for “nonprofit home repair.”

“The Facebook page helps me stay in touch now that I’ve moved to Seattle because it just pops up on my computer when I log on,” says former board member Aaron Kitson. “Social media targets a younger audience and I think Facebook allows us to tap into that market.”

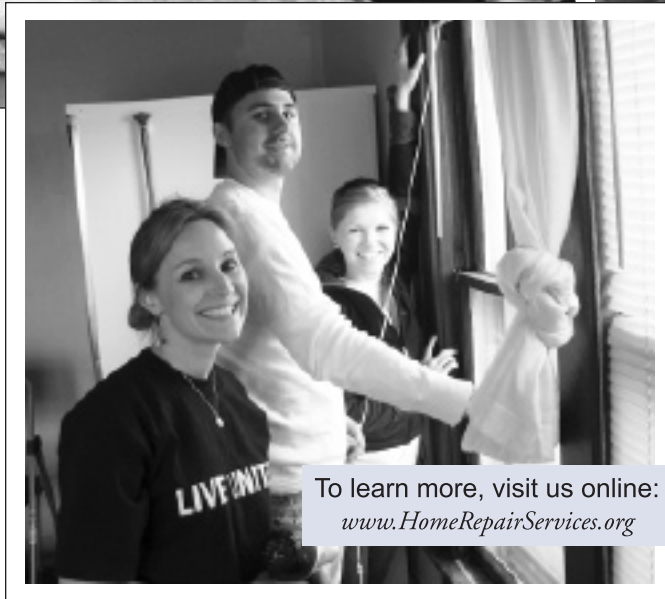
“Long gone are the days when you call the Better Business Bureau to check out an organization,” Aaron says. “If it’s not on the web, people don’t even look any further.” **■**

# Group Volunteer Opportunities

*Have Fun Together While Doing Something Good for People in Need*



*Volunteers fulfill mission-critical tasks at Home Repair Services. Clockwise from top left: Preparing a bathroom vanity for installation; mixing paint for the Builders' Abundance Store; winterizing a home during the 2010 Chill Out effort.*



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

**Question:** What do helping an elderly woman stay warm in the winter, strengthening relationships with your peers, and discovering a new passion have in common? If you ask Jeff Dykstra, he'll say these are all benefits of volunteering at Home Repair Services.

Jeff is a member of the Heart of West Michigan United Way's NextGen effort, a group of millennials (persons born between the mid-1970s and late 1990s) who reach out a helping hand to their community.

**"What first drew me** to involve our group in the November Chill Out Day was that this was a volunteer event to help the older generation winterize their homes," says Jeff. "Something as simple as putting plastic over windows helped the homeowners be warmer and save money. This was one of NextGen's first community engagement events and it moved us forward; it gave us some momentum."

Home Repair Services offers other dynamic opportunities for groups of up to 10 people who want to engage for a day or a few days helping build kitchen and bathroom cabinets in the woodshop,

building a wheelchair ramp, mixing paint to sell in the Builders' Abundance store or helping with the annual Making It Home Auction. There's also a need for an enterprising volunteer to act as a coordinator of volunteer efforts.

**Groups from churches,** businesses, community organizations and colleges not only help people who really need their help, they strengthen bonds within the group and kindle passions for giving back to the community.

"Home Repair Services also has smaller projects that need volunteers, like helping seniors move items in their homes or keeping someone company to help them feel more comfortable when

workers are outside building a wheelchair ramp," Jeff says. "Rather than waiting for a big event, NextGen is talking about bringing a couple of people together instead of having to bring on a large group."

Mike Zamarron, procurement coordinator, notes that volunteering with a group offers an experience that's distinct from that of an individual volunteer.

**"These volunteer groups** are a key element in what we're trying to accomplish," Mike says. "It's great to see the relationships within the groups grow as they recognize the benefit their team efforts provide to the families we serve."

And how does it look from a volunteer's perspective?

"When you volunteer," says Jeff Dykstra, "you realize that not only are you enriching someone else's life, you're empowering yours."

To find out more about volunteering with your group or organization at Home Repair Services, please call (616) 241-2601 or visit [www.HomeRepairsServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairsServices.org). ■

# Encouragement and Persistence Pay Off!

## *Gabrielle Luster Receives 2011 Resourceful Homeowner Award*



*Gabrielle Luster and her children, Troy and Denia, are all smiles. At right, a view of her remodeled kitchen.*

**“If all these people are willing to help me, then I need to keep pushing and help myself.”** With that declaration, Gabrielle Luster decided it was time to resume remodeling her Southeast Grand Rapids home.

A single mom of a 16-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter, Gabrielle received the 2011 Resourceful Homeowner Award at the Resourceful Homeowner Celebration on February 24. Over 300 people gathered to celebrate her accomplishments and those of the other three finalists: Jose and Agustina Olmos, Jesus and Anzuetha Vargas and Dean and Lisa Woodard.

**Gabrielle began renovations in 2006** and struggled through a number of hardships that took their toll – the death

of a beloved brother, a devastating home invasion and theft, job loss and a year of unemployment. Despite these setbacks, Gabrielle went back to school and earned her master’s in education. She now works for the Department of Human Services as an investigator for Children’s Protective Services.

“At my lowest point I got a call from Home Repair Services and Doug DeHaan came over and found all the air leaks in my house,” she says. “My gas bills were so high. He had a list of everything that was wrong and I just cried. I said, ‘I can’t do this.’ But he found a way to help me get the materials I needed to seal up my house.”

**Encouraged by the support**, Gabrielle picked up the pieces and continued her remodeling projects. She pulled up carpeting to find hardwood floors in bad shape. Unable to afford to rent a floor sander, she sanded the floors on her hands and knees using a hand sander. Her list of projects includes completely gutting and redesigning the kitchen, relocating the basement access door and installing insulation and drywall in the basement to create a “little getaway” where the family can enjoy movie nights.

“I took so many Fix-it classes I can’t name them all,” she says. “And I taught some of the women-only classes to help other women become more confident making home repairs.

**“I don’t think it would be possible** for people like us to own and maintain a home if it wasn’t for Home Repair Services,” Gabrielle says. “It’s a win/win for everybody – for the neighborhoods that are built up by having more homeowners and for the homeowners who can get materials at a discounted price; there’s so much I can’t even sum it all up.” ■



## **Time Capsule:** *16 Years of Celebrating Local Homeowners*

The Resourceful Homeowner Celebration began in 1995 and has been celebrated annually except for 2000 when Home Repair Services relocated to its current home.

The selection committee for the Resourceful Homeowner Award includes elected officials, community advocates and business leaders who understand the needs of lower-income families in Kent County. Participation on the selection committee is a “rite of passage” for new Home Repair Services board members.

Since 2007, the Resourceful Homeowner Celebration has included special recognition of volunteers who make our work possible. These special honorees have included:

- 2007 – Marion Vos and the wheelchair ramp builders
- 2008 – Dore Westra, former staff member and Repair Team volunteer
- 2009 – Jose Juarez, Fix-it School instructor
- 2010 – Keith Taylor, Fix-it School instructor
- 2011 – Abe DeVries, Emeritus Board Member

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## Save the Date! Oct. 20, 2011

### *Making It Home Benefit Auction*

Mark your calendars now for the 8th annual "Making It Home" auction on Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011. All proceeds will benefit the non-profit mission of Home Repair Services. This fun event will dazzle you with:

- More than 100 unique and exciting auction items
- Gourmet hors d'oeuvres by San Chez - A Tapas Bistro
- Specialty wines and beers by Art of the Table
- Live on-site bidding plus online pre-bidding
- Free valet parking and more!

Doors open at 6 p.m. at 1100 S. Division Ave. in the heart of Grand Rapids. To reserve your tickets, call **(616) 241-2601**, or visit [www.HomeRepairServices.org](http://www.HomeRepairServices.org). A portion of each ticket purchase is tax-deductible. Thank you!



Thursday  
Oct. 20, 2011

## Making It Home

Benefit Auction



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



Resources for Home Owners

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, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

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