

News from Home



Home Repair Services

A Non-profit Organization

Resources for Home Owners

Spring 2008

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Crowning with Quality: Debra Bierema Wins 2008 Resourceful Homeowner Award

Debra Bierema will be the first to tell you she's a stickler for details; she's an inspector of auto gauge needles produced on her line at Monroe LLC. And that eye for detail played in her favor to help her win the 2008 Resourceful Homeowner top prize for renovations she did on her Kentwood home.

"At work, I don't let any mistakes go past, and my experience there made my quality of work for my house better," Deb says. "I was always saying 'that needs more paint here, more caulk there, this needs to be smoothed out a little more,'" she adds with a laugh.

Deb may have a good eye, but it was her hard work that won her a \$500 gift certificate at Modern Hardware and formal recognition at the Resourceful Homeowner Celebration at Meijer Gardens on February 21.

She took 19 Fix-It School classes, including tiling, drywall repair, window glazing, and faux painting. She and her coach, Cara Oosterhouse, gutted and renovated Deb's bathroom and kitchen,

updated the plumbing and electrical, tiled the shower and laid a new wood floor. In spite of suffering from fibromyalgia, Deb pushed through the pain to upgrade her home – something as a single-income household she couldn't afford to hire done.

"I didn't care how much I hurt, I wanted to learn it," Deb says. "I'm really proud and very excited that I learned, so I can keep doing more and can help other people. I felt so confident after doing my kitchen and bathroom, I refinished my living room

floor and repaired a wall on my own, not as part of the competition."

William and Deneen Mason, Linda McIntosh, and José and Angelica Chavez earned honors at the Celebration as runners up after completing major repairs on their homes that included the installation of whole new kitchens and bathrooms.

All of the contestants purchased the majority of their materials from the Builders' Abundance Store, took Fix-It School classes, and borrowed tools and materials from the Tool Library. ■



Other 2008 award finalists included (left) William and Deneen Mason; (middle) José and Angelica Chavez; and (right) Linda McIntosh. More than 370 people attended the 2008 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration at the Frederik Meijer Gardens.

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Foreclosure Crisis Update:

Local Banks Donate \$40,000 to Help Families with Foreclosure Intervention

Last fall, board member Pat Gill, president of Byron Bank, asked business associate Laurie TerMaat of Chemical Bank to work with him on a project to visit every bank in Kent County, tell them about Home Repair Services' Foreclosure Intervention Program, and ask them for funding.

About the same time, the Great Lakes Capital Fund (GLCF), a private community development investment group, called. The GLCF has made significant investments to revitalize lower-income neighborhoods, but the number of foreclosures is leaving those neighborhoods with vacant houses and fewer people.

Thank You!

Bank of Holland
Byron Bank
CHASE
Chemical Bank
Choice One Bank
Comerica
Fifth Third
Macatawa Bank
Mercantile Bank
Northern Trust Bank
United Bank of Michigan
West Michigan Mortgage
Lenders Association

The GLCF offered a \$25,000 challenge grant if Home Repair Services could get area banks to pledge a matching \$25,000.

"We've visited 15 banks since September 1 and have raised \$40,000 from them," says Dave Jacobs, executive director. "We'll soon receive the 25,000 grant. We're just delighted by that."

Choice One Bank is one of the program's supporters: "Any time we can keep people in their homes it helps the whole community," says Jim Bosserd, CEO. "Any way we can help our customers or somebody else's customers



Financial Counselors at Home Repair Services have helped hundreds of local families avoid foreclosure during the last 12 months. Pictured here are staff members Tracie Coffman, Chantil Skinner, Gwendolyn Miller, Darrin Lucas and Leticia Perez.

learn about the options available to save their homes it's a win/win."

Last December, one more piece of this amazing financial puzzle fell into place. The Grand Rapids Community Foundation, concerned about the high foreclosure rates, called and asked if Home Repair Services had sufficient capacity to keep up with the need.

While the Foreclosure Intervention Program has never fallen behind or had a waiting list, there was a need for a fifth financial counselor because the foreclosure rate is increasing so rapidly.

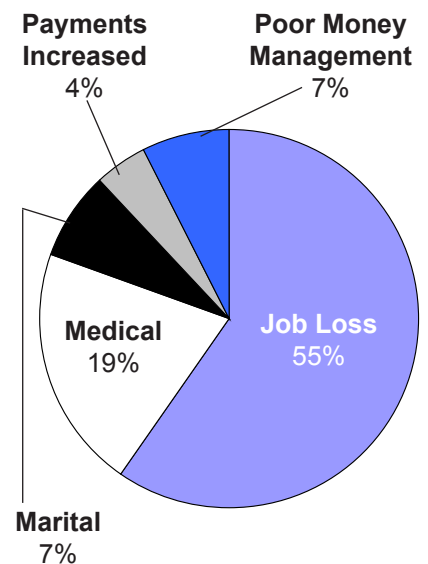
The Community Foundation awarded a \$50K grant, and financial counselor Gwendolyn Miller came aboard in January. **All told, funders have pledged an incredible \$115,000 to the Foreclosure Intervention Program so far.**

"Along the way I've met some sincere people who are concerned about this foreclosure epidemic and what it's doing to the fabric of our community," says Dave Jacobs. "But this fund gathering isn't finished. We still have 11 banks

to go."

Many thanks to the banks and organizations who are supporting our efforts to keep families in their homes. *We can't do it without you!* ■

Most Common Causes of Foreclosure Trouble (Client Records 2007)



Profile: People Who Make a Difference at Home Repair Services



Doré Westra fitting a pipe in a client's basement, circa 1990. During the 2008 Resourceful Homeowners Celebration, Dave Jacobs honored Doré Westra for his three decades of helping lower-income families in Kent County. The story at right is an excerpt from Dave's tribute.

Much of what Home Repair Services has become is due to who Doré Westra is; in a very real sense, we built Home Repair Services around Doré and others like him. In June, Doré celebrates 30 years with Home Repair Services—remarkable when you consider he was 53 when he started here and already had a successful 30-year career as a builder in Spring Lake.

In 1978, Doré accepted a job with the Catholic Human Development Office as a repairman in their Minor Repair Program. A year later that program became Home Repair Services.

He loved a mechanical challenge and was interested in furnaces and heating. We built on Doré's skills and made him our repair supervisor.

One evening in '83 or '84, Doré and I walked into City Hall and asked the Grand Rapids HVAC Licensing

board to give Doré a limited license to repair and replace old furnaces. They did but the condition was that

Doré would have to pass a college level course on HVAC principals. Doré passed the course and since then Home Repair Services has replaced more than 1,000 furnaces.

Along the way, Doré and Bob Hengeveld became good friends. First Bob worked for Doré, and then as Doré began

to retire, we promoted Bob to Repair Manager and Doré worked for Bob. Today Doré works every Tuesday; he and Bob usually tackle a difficult electrical problem or furnace job together.

For Doré Westra, this work is a ministry. And for 30 years, Doré has been ministering to thousands of lower-income homeowners with his pipe wrenches. ■



Consultation Program Helps Seniors Avoid Home Repair "Rip Offs"

Cara Oosterhouse, one of Home Repair Services' repair consultants, can tell you horror stories about senior citizens who have paid a down payment for home repair work and never saw the contractor again. Besides that, although some repair contractors are very reputable, some don't even bother to show up.

A new program, Home Repair Consultations for Seniors, assesses the repair, determines what needs to be done, and then lines up a reputable contractor to do the work.

Cara, a licensed builder who's built over 400 houses, heads up the program. She does a free assessment for each client and if the repair needs a contractor, she makes the arrangements.

"I've lined up contractors for plumbing, roofing, electrical work, and furnaces – those repairs come up again and again,"



Clare and Mara Parks are among the hundreds of senior citizens in Kent County who partner with Home Repair Services each year.

Cara says. "One lady had suffered a stroke and could no longer get downstairs because the handrails were inadequate. Proper handrails were installed, and I was there when she was able to get downstairs. She just started crying because she was so happy."

The program, funded through the Kent County Senior Millage, serves seniors who make 50 to 100 percent of the area median income. Depending on income, the seniors pay from 15 to 100 percent of the repair costs.

"The best thing about the program is the peace of mind it gives seniors," Cara says. "They know they're not going to get ripped off." ■

Type of Service (2007)	Seniors Served	% of Total
Repair Team Jobs	604	50%
Builders' Abundance store	297	22%
Fix-it School	35	6%
Foreclosure Intervention	63	8%
Ramps / Access Modifications	26	56%
All Clients Served	823	25%

HÁGALO USTED DE MANERA SEGURA

New Program Helps Spanish-Speaking Homeowners Make Repairs Safely



José Juárez (left) helps Angel Alcántara learn how to use power tools safely.

In the summer of 2007, Home Repair Services launched HÁGALO USTED DE MANERA SEGURA – You Can Do It Safely – a service that provides Spanish-speaking homeowners with home improvement coaching services. The program provides a coach who works alongside homeowners in their homes, teaching them how to do major repairs while observing lead-safety practices.

José Juárez, a former client and a Resourceful Homeowners nominee, leads the program. And, while Home Repair Services budgets 15 hours a week for José's services, he often volunteers another 15 because he loves the program so much.

"I tell you the truth, I help everybody," José says. "My focus right now is the Spanish people who come from countries who don't give them information about lead paint, how it affects your kids, your family. They don't know it's dangerous."

José says most of the homes he works in are about 100 years old and many of the repairs involve replacing windows and doors. Much of the paint on the frames is lead-based and old; dust finds its way into carpeting where children can get it on their hands and then into their mouths.

"The people don't know how they could contaminate their house," he says. "One gram of lead paint can contaminate ten houses around your house."

Vicente Pérez says he didn't know anything about home repairs or lead safety until taking some Fix-It School classes, and even then, he didn't have the confidence to tackle major home repairs alone. José coached him three hours a week for five months.

"I don't understand English very well," Vicente says. "José taught the classes, then helped me in my home to safely replace windows, doors, and electrical. He taught about lead in the paint and how it hurts children."

Vicente goes on to say that now he's confident about his abilities and does home repairs without a coach.

"I call José with small questions," Vicente says, "but I know how to do almost everything now." ■



To learn more, visit us online:
www.HomeRepairServices.org

José Juárez (right) helps Home Repair Services client Angel Alcántara install surplus windows in an older home on Grand Rapids southeast side. José leads a new program for Spanish-speaking homeowners in Kent County called HÁGALO USTED DE MANERA SEGURA, which means "You Can Do It Safely" in English.

In Translation: Repair Terms

Hammer = **Martillo**
Ladder = **Escalera**
Paint = **Pintura**
Window = **Ventana**
Door = **Puerta**

Screwdriver = **Destornillador**
Saw = **Vio**
Nail = **Clavo**
Screw = **Tornillo**
Measurement = **Medida**
Length = **Longitud**

To learn more, visit us online:
www.HomeRepairServices.org



Got Surplus? Your Extra Building Materials Are Valuable!

What should you do with surplus and lightly used building materials? Call Home Repair Services! We'll send a truck directly to your site to pick up new, surplus or lightly used building materials – 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 our Web site online at: www.HomeRepairServices.org.

Free pick-up is just the beginning. Your donation may also qualify for tax deduction (see your tax advisor). It's good for the environment. It's good for you. And it's great for the future of our community.

The next time you have surplus building materials – from a job site, from a tear-down or in your company's warehouse – just call Home Repair Services to arrange a free pick-up. You'll be glad you did! ■

Reuse, Recycle, Repair...

Remodelers Donate Much-Needed Kitchen Cabinets

It may take a little extra effort, but Morris Builders doesn't mind. They, and a number of other builders and remodelers, are helping Home Repair Services maintain its reputation as a



José Acosta and his "new" kitchen cabinets.

catalyst for recycling and reusing home repair materials through the Builders' Abundance Store. Many of those efforts revolve around one important, and pricey, component that's often demolished during a home remodel – cabinets, both kitchen and bath.

"I ask my clients if they're keeping any of the cabinets we're removing," says

Kirk Morris, owner of Morris Builders. "If they aren't, I suggest that they donate the usable pieces to Home Repair Services. The Builder's Abundance Store picks up the cabinets and leaves my client a tax donation form."

Kirk says prefab cabinets, which are pre-assembled and installed as a series of "boxes," are the easiest to save. Just a few simple steps on the part of the remodeler – like removing the cabinet doors and the crown moldings, and carefully unscrewing the cabinets from the wall – makes the difference between a reusable cabinet and one that's been reduced to scrap lumber.

Morris Builders also encourages clients to donate other materials.

"We've given interior doors and trim, laminate and solid surface countertops, grab bars, lock sets, carpeting, columns, faucets and windows," Kirk says. "I hate to see stuff go to waste. Instead of these things going to the landfill and increasing the big junk pile, somebody gets to use them for another lifetime."

In 2007, Home Repair Services saved 279 tons of cabinets and other

Free Pickup!
 Call 241-2601

Item	Description
Lumber	Studs, plywood, etc.
Sheet Goods	1/2 sheet or larger
Drywall	Useable condition
Flooring	Carpet, vinyl, etc.
Paint	Latex only, please
Siding	Vinyl, aluminum
Roofing	Shingles, flashing
Bathroom	Tubs, toilets, sinks
Cabinets	Surplus / lightly used
Windows	Reusable condition

materials from landfills. Kirk has encouraged clients to donate to Home Repair Services for nearly a decade, and he highly recommends it to other builders.

"It makes you feel good inside because you're giving people who don't have a lot of money a chance to fix up their homes, you save on your waste costs, you save the landfills, and your clients get the tax write off for the donation. Everybody wins." ■

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Resources for Home Owners

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Grand Rapids, MI 49507-1024

Mark Your Calendar for Fun!

Benefit Auction with Live Music Returns on Oct. 16

Music. Food. Wine. Incredible auction deals! It's all happening at Home Repair Services on Thursday, Oct. 16, 2008. You're invited to attend our 5th annual *Making It Home* benefit auction. This could be the most fun you can have without breaking the law. To reserve your tickets or find out more, call (616) 241-2601 or visit us online at www.HomeRepairServices.org on the Internet today!

All proceeds from the auction, including ticket sales, will be used to support the non-profit mission of Home Repair Services, which serves more than 3,500 lower-income families in our local community each year. Tell your friends about this exciting event and encourage them to join you! All are welcome to participate.



To learn more, visit us online:
www.HomeRepairServices.org

Making It Home Benefit Auction



Resources for Home Owners

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 eligible for tax deduction by the donor. Your questions and suggestions are welcome. www.HomeRepairservices.org

