

PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

Bill Lewis



It is simple for Home Repair Services (HRS) volunteer, Bill Lewis, “I volunteer at HRS because I want to give back to my community and I like how HRS provides critical services to so many people.” Bill joined the West Michigan community in 1994 after moving from Irving Texas. When settled, Bill wanted to help local charities, so he did some research and eventually discovered Home Repair Services. The connection started with donated materials to the Builder’s Abundance store, but over time, his appreciation of the HRS mission and service offerings to vulnerable people deepened.

After a successful 20-year career in group health insurance, Bill decided to retire in 2015. He wanted to use his newfound resource of time to become a volunteer somewhere where he felt he would be making a real difference. He remembered HRS and inquired about volunteer opportunities. He first utilized his skills in the Housing Counseling & Financial Education Program by contributing to a curriculum and teaching Money Matters classes. Bill’s wealth of knowledge on medical and other lines of insurance was especially valuable to those attending the free workshops.

After some firsthand experiences in working on projects around his own home, Bill eventually transitioned over to the HRS Cabinet Shop where he quickly became hooked by the tangible nature of the work and the opportunity to use tools. Bill shared, “I wanted to branch out and use my hands. Cabinet building looked like fun, and I thought it would be another place to support the community.” Bill also found a sense of belonging with the other cabinet builders enjoying the camaraderie. “I really love the fact that at HRS there are a variety of volunteer opportunities.”

Bill is a man of many talents including administration. It did not take long before he was approached about expanding his volunteer role by prepping all the production orders. Because of Bill, the cabinet “crew” are organized, efficient, and fully focused on building to specifications. Nowadays, you might find Bill pouring over paperwork at a table in the HRS break room or pushing plywood through a table saw in the shop. Wherever you may find him, Bill is likely to have a smile on his face. “I am happy when I do this and love donating my time for such a good cause.”

Thank you, Bill, for sharing your time, talent, and treasure here at HRS to strengthen our community. You truly are making a difference.

New Patio Benches — Reduce Waste, Increase Volunteers, Support More Ramps

Home Repair Services recently began building patio furniture made from the leftover lumber ends from the wheelchair ramps it annually builds. The idea is the brainchild of Mike Zamarron, Self-Help Program Manager, who dreamed up the beautiful and sturdy bench designs. Mike shared, “I wanted to find a way to use the pile of lumber ends for good. These benches can be built by volunteers and the proceeds from what was scrap, can go to support our mission.”

Look for the HRS benches and tables to go on sale at the start of the 2023 ramp building season!



Amway volunteers build proto-type benches

HRS Design Supports Budding Artist at Lincoln School

The collage in the below photo was a thank you note to Self-Help Program Manager, Mike Zamarron, and HRS volunteer, Bob Johnson, from students and teachers at Lincoln School, a school for children with unique learning challenges. One of Lincoln’s teachers is a participant in the Remodeling Together Program, and she mentioned to Mike how it would be nice to have a tray made from wood that could keep her student’s paint jars from constantly tipping over. Mike brought the need to HRS Cabinet Shop volunteer and retired engineer, Bob, and before long, he had designed and built just such a tray that wonderfully keeps the jars upright. Way to go, Mike and Bob!



news from HOME



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Grand Rapids, MI 49507
616.241.2601
www.homerepairservices.org

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Join Us For a Lunch & Learn Tour

Home Repair Services continues to host monthly Lunch & Learn events in our building located at 1100 S. Division in Grand Rapids. We invite you to join us for a behind-the-scenes look at how HRS touches the lives of thousands of Kent County neighbors each year. We look forward to inviting you into our home, sharing how we strengthen housing structures and the people living in them and answering your questions about HRS. The event is from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm, with a tasty box lunch provided. If you have a few extra minutes, feel free to stay for a tour of our converted 1940’s era auto dealership. Whether you are new to HRS or have been a longtime friend, please be our guest.

Please contact Steven Nicolet at 616-241-2601 ext. 223 or snicolet@homerepairservices.org

Upcoming 2023 Lunch & Learn Dates

- | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Friday, January 20 | Friday, March 17 | Friday, May 19 | Friday, July 21 |
| Friday, February 17 | Friday, April 21 | Friday, June 16 | Friday, August 18 |



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news from HOME



HOME REPAIR SERVICES
RESOURCES FOR HOMEOWNERS

FALL 2022



REPAIR TEAM FEATURE: A roll-in shower for Cristian

When Ana Dominquez speaks about the home that she and her husband, Claudio Cruz, purchased four years ago, her face beams. The couple purchased the southeast Grand Rapids craftsman style home after it had been foreclosed and became property of the Kent County Land Bank. And while they knew it was old (built in 1916) and would need a ton of work, they also saw plenty of potential and were confident it would provide a stable home for their children Michelle (16) and Cristian (13).

Since closing on the home, they have worked long hours to create a safe and beautiful dwelling for their family. With help of family members who have some construction experience, Claudio has worked diligently in transforming every room in the house and the exterior including the landscaping. They have patched original plaster, installed wood flooring, installed vinyl siding, remodeled the kitchen, and painted, painted, and painted some more. What was once an eyesore is now a gem of the block.

But to make the home truly safe for Cristian, who has a number of unique health challenges including quadriplegic cerebral

palsy, Claudio and Ana would need the expertise of Home Repair Services. The first project was the construction of a wheelchair access ramp – completed in 2018 – and just recently, one of the bathrooms was modified to accommodate a roll-in shower stall. Ana’s ability to lift Cristian into the shower was no longer physically possible and the tight bath space made the use of assistive equipment unrealistic.

For Ana’s safety and Cristian’s, a roll-in shower would make the most sense but it came with elevated costs. But with funding support from the City of Grand Rapids and a special gift from the local AMBUCS chapter, HRS Repair Program Manager, John Guichelaar, was able to creatively redesign the limited space to include a 60” x 37” shower that would have less than a 1” threshold. In the process, John also eliminated one of the two passage doors leading into the bathroom, creating better flow and the option of relocating the sink vanity. With sink out of the way, the new bath has a turning radius for Cristian’s wheelchair to be pivoted and it provided straight paths to accessing both the toilet and shower.

Beyond the design elements, the project presented some interesting challenges along the way, including a bath floor consisting of two layers of ceramic tile with a very heavy concrete base coat. John shared, “Just cutting away the tile to prep for the new shower pan and mechanicals was quite a battle. Once we opened the walls, we found the condition of the shower valve and piping to be in bad shape, so we took the opportunity to upgrade those as well. Our team had to wall-in the former door opening and with a roll-in shower, we had to consider ways to seal the floor from any stray water from the shower.”

John went on, “It was one of our bigger bath modification jobs and a bit of a puzzle to solve, but it came together nicely, and we were really motivated to help make caring for Cristian easier and safer.”

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HRS staff compete in the GR Fire Fighters Challenge



National Nail ramp build volunteer crew selfie



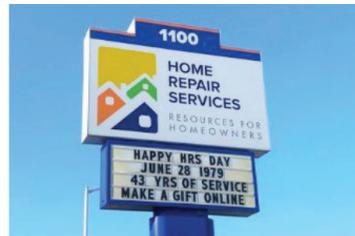
Amway volunteers build kitchen cabinets



Fence Consultants and HRS at LMCU Ballpark as "NonprofitHits" beneficiary



Old National Bank volunteers in the Cabinet Shop



First ever HRS Day launched on our 43rd anniversary

Record crowd gathered for the 2022 Impact Celebration Party!

- Presenting Sponsor: **Old National Bank**
- Beverage Sponsor: **First Merchants Bank**
- Dessert Sponsor: **ChoiceOne Bank**
- Gold Sponsors: **Independent Bank, Lake Trust Credit Union, Northpointe Bank**
- Held in the continuously evolving Home Repair Services outer lobby
- A full house with a record high 168 rsvp's
- Debut of a hand-crafted quilt made from 30 years' worth of HRS t-shirts
- A celebration of our collective impact during the 2021/22 fiscal year
- A feast of food and drink provided by Two Scotts Barbecue, D. Schuler's, and Everything Bundt Cakes



Save these dates and plan on joining us!

The 2023 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration
March 2, 2023 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm
Fredrick Meijer Gardens

The 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast
April 19, 2023 8:00 am – 9:30 am
Home Repair Services Lobby

For more details or to inquire about sponsoring these two incredible events, contact Steven Nicolet at snicolet@homerepairservices.org or (616) 241-2601 ext. 223.

SELF-HELP PROGRAMS

DIY Workshops: Bigger and better than ever

What a year! The Do-It-Yourself workshops hosted each Saturday in the Fix-It School had a record year of attendance after resuming in-person sessions in July of 2021. Each weekend, eager homeowners from all over West Michigan made their way to HRS to gain knowledge and develop skills in topics ranging from plumbing, electrical, flooring, ceramic tile installation, drywall repair, cabinet installation, window and door installation, and more.

This past year, average attendance was 24 per session – an all-time attendance record. And for the first four months of our current fiscal year, the numbers are up 32% over the same period last year! The secret is out – come to HRS for practical and applicable home improvement skills.

With support from ChoiceOne Bank, we welcomed the return of our Women's Only Workshops (all ages), and with support from the Kent County Senior Millage, the popular Handy Helen sessions which gather women over age 60 to learn DIY skills also returned. Taught by one of our carpenters, Dina Rowland, the women-only workshops have once again proved to be immensely popular and attract women from all over the area. On August 15, a women-only record 51 students filled the Fix-It School to capacity, where earlier that day, 11 ladies had taken part in one of the Handy Helen sessions.

One of the Handy Helen attendees shared, "I may be older, but I am still learning. These classes help me save money and I am passing down valuable skills to my grandchildren."

Also noteworthy from our Saturday session was the day we welcomed the 1000th student for the year. The lucky attendee received a \$25 gift card, and everyone attending that day celebrated with a tasty donut. It was a true celebration after having had to pause our in-person workshops for a year because of the pandemic.

Our team has added more workshops through our growing partnership with Kent District Library (KDL). Each quarter, our Self-Help team does a virtual livestream session via the KDL platform, then we visit select branches over the following three months to offer that same topic in our "hands-on" teaching format. During the fall season, we have introduced a new series called "Keep the Cold Out," a curriculum designed to bring awareness and build knowledge around air sealing and home weatherization.

Lake Michigan Credit Union continues to sponsor our flagship Saturday workshops with the Kent County Senior Millage underwriting Handy Helen once again. And this year, we are pleased to welcome ChoiceOne Bank as the presenting sponsor for the Women Only Workshops.



Repair Team Feature - continued

As the project finished, Ana could hardly contain her joy and gratitude. "We are so thankful for all the help we have received from Home Repair Services. Cristian loves to take showers, but it was becoming hard on me. With the ramp and now the new bath, Cristian can go outside, and he can take lots of showers." And as Ana said those words, a smile came across Cristian's face – a smile of agreement.

(Last year, Home Repair Services completed 56-bathroom modifications for residents all over Kent County.)



HOUSING COUNSELING & FINANCIAL EDUCATION

COUNSELING: HRS stops foreclosure just in time

Gerald, a northwest Grand Rapids homeowner, was unable to work during the pandemic and he was deemed ineligible for unemployment benefits. The pressure intensified as his wife, Joan, had qualified as permanently disabled but was not immediately eligible for social security disability benefits. By the time Gerald and Joan met with HRS Housing Counselor, Amber Jones, their back mortgage payments, taxes, insurance, and some utilities had reached \$25,000 and were still mounting.

With Amber's assistance, Gerald was able to successfully submit a complete application to the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Fund. The assistance fund is for homeowners with financial hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible candidates can receive up to \$25,000 in catch-up funds. With the application submitted, all that was left to do was wait for an answer. But with thousands of applications entering the system, the answers were slow to come. And after a couple of months, Gerald's mortgage company had grown impatient, and the home was scheduled for a Sheriff's Sale.

The pending sale put Amber on a mission to get an answer for Gerald and Joan, pleading that their case be escalated in time to potentially stave off a looming foreclosure sale. Fortunately, her voice of advocacy reached sympathetic ears and the case was reviewed and approved for the full \$25,000 in hardship funds.

But with the extra months of waiting tacked on to the unpaid mortgage balance, their debt had now grown to be just over \$28,000. And even though Gerald had recently returned to work, he still did not have the \$3,000 built up in savings to cover the shortfall.

Fortunately, because Home Repair Services is a HUD - approved counseling agency, Amber was positioned to seamlessly enter conversations with the Gerald's lender. She was able to share of the pending MIHAF grant of \$25,000, and most importantly, she could explore ways to modify the loan so that the unmet \$3,000 could be incorporated into a restructured loan and not place the home in jeopardy. In the end, the mortgage lender agreed to adjust the terms and call off the Sheriff's Sale. Gerald has gone back to work and this scary time is now behind this couple – another HRS counseling success story!

(Since beginning to offer housing counseling in 2001, Home Repair Services has helped over 3,000 area homeowners avoid the devastation of a foreclosure.)



Mortgage foreclosures on the rise

89 mortgage foreclosures during the first 7 months of 2022

43 mortgage foreclosures for all 12 months of 2021

Source: The Kent County Treasurers office



EDUCATION: In-person classes are back

Over the last six months, HRS has re-introduced in person classes as part of Money Matters and Financial Capabilities series. Alisa Flores, Housing Counseling & Financial Education Program Manager, stated, "While offering these financial classes virtually is a good thing, there is something special about teaching them in person. We're glad that we are back to offering both options including some sessions in Spanish!"

Follow us on social media.



For more details or to inquire about foreclosure counseling or financial education at HRS, contact Alisa Flores at aflores@homerepairservices.org or (616) 241-2601 ext.239