



## REPAIR TEAM FEATURE: A 58 Year Wait for a New Roof

“When that truck pulled up with all the stuff on it, I could hardly believe it,” Jessie Edwards recalls. After 58 years of wear and tear, her southeast Grand Rapids home was finally getting a new roof.

“All I could think about was how nice it was going to be to go upstairs and not see that leak coming down like a fountain. What a blessing!”

The leaking roof previously had Jessie worried. Replacing it was too costly for her to afford on a fixed income, and she wasn’t sure what to do. Thanks to the combined efforts of Home Repair Services and Amplify GR, her anxiety has been replaced with gratitude.

“I was watching [the roof] leak and looking at my savings account, and it had me worrying about it nonstop. Then I met this young lady.” Jessie motions to Dee Dee Taylor, Housing Resource Specialist with Home Repair Services. “She told me about the Neighborhood Strong Program, and it gave me hope. I’ll never forget the two of us sitting at my kitchen table filling out the paperwork. And every time we talked on the

phone, she told me to stop worrying, that she had this.

“When you get to 88 years old like me, sometimes you wonder if you haven’t been forgotten about,” Jessie reflects. “But getting approved for the program was a reminder for me that I am not alone. Other people are still there for me in my time of need. I am so grateful for Dee Dee and this program!”

This wasn’t the first time in her life that Jessie had found blessings in the way others showed up for her in a moment of crisis.

“I have always felt blessed in life, and this new roof is just another reminder,” Jessie shares as we chat about her life story and journey as a homeowner. “It started when my mom passed away before I was even two years old. My oldest sister took us in so the younger kids could stay together. Whenever I have been in a time of crisis, other people have been there for me. It has created in me a love for people.”

Originally from Texas, Jessie found a new home in Grand Rapids with her five young

children after a divorce in the mid-1960s. “I was pursuing a better life, and I came here to stay with my sister for a bit,” Jessie recalls. “I found this home, and with financial support from my ex-husband, I was able to purchase it in 1965. He wanted to make sure our kids had a good place up here in Michigan. ... I would make the land-contract payments at the Old Kent Bank branch just around the corner. I will never forget the day I went in to make the final payment. The banker told me to keep it, that there was a note in the file that read, ‘the final payment is yours to keep.’”

By then, Jessie had remarried. Her second husband, Joe, worked for a road construction company and helped build US-131 highway in Grand Rapids and I-75 in Detroit. “He was a good man,” Jessie says. She has a lot of good memories from the 58 years she’s lived in her home. “All five of my kids were raised in this house, and they all went on to college, and now I have lots of grandkids and great grandkids. Yep, I have been blessed!”

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2023 Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast



Volunteers from BDR Custom Homes rebuild a porch



Carpentry Supervisor, David Scheidel, retires after 34 years



Joel Ruiter speaks of partnerships at MSU FCU grand opening



Trinity Lutheran Church volunteers build a ramp



National Nail volunteers build benches

# Full House Enjoys 2023 Impact Celebration Party!

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- Dessert Sponsor: **ChoiceOne Bank**
- Gold Sponsors: **Independent Bank, Lake Trust Credit Union, Horizon Bank, LMCU, Fifth Third Bank, West Michigan Community Bank**
- A packed house gathered in the Home Repair Services outer lobby
- Tours of the HRS Cabinet Shop and Bench Building Room
- A celebration of our collective impact during the 2022/23 fiscal year
- A feast of food and drink provided by Two Scotts Barbecue, Beviamo, and Everything Bundt Cakes



Save these dates and plan on joining us!

**The 2024 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration**  
 March 7, 2024 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm  
 Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

**The 2024 Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast**  
 April 24, 2024 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](mailto:snicolet@homerepairservices.org) or (616) 241-2601 ext. 223.

# Home Maintenance Check-up: Big Jump in Completed Inspections

The two programs most affected by the pandemic were the Fix-It School and the Home Maintenance Check-Up inspections. Once the pandemic subsided, the Fix-It School rebounded almost immediately to full workshops of eager DIY students. And now after a 55% increase in completed inspections, the Home Maintenance Check-Up program is back to firing on all cylinders.

The Home Maintenance Check-Up is a free comprehensive post-purchase home inspection. It provides homeowners with a full report of findings and recommended actions, ensuring that their homes remain in good working order. The final written report is categorized under three headings:

**Health, Safety, and Security:** These are immediate or short-term issues that center on keeping inhabitants safe.

**The “Bones” of the Home:** These items are medium to long-term and higher cost repair issues that the homeowner likely needs to begin saving money for a future remedy.

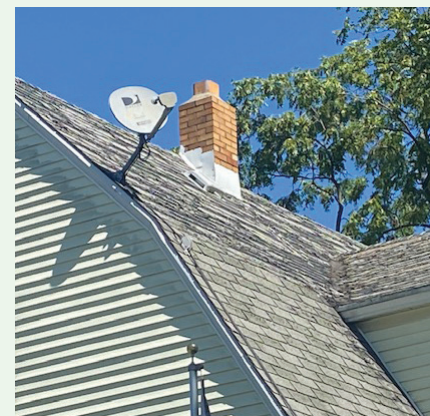
**Cosmetic Issues:** These are interior or exterior visual flaws that can be prioritized based on the homeowner’s preferences and budget.

The heart of the HMC program lies in the dedication of trained Home Repair Services staff and expert volunteers, who conduct the one-one-one sessions with homeowners all over Kent County. These professionals perform thorough inspections, assessing the home’s condition for short-term and long-term maintenance and repair needs. For many homeowners, it has been decades since the structure was reviewed by a professional. And as a trusted non-profit organization, the homeowner is assured the inspector comes with no hidden agenda to sell follow-up services.

In commenting on the HMC, Mike Zamarron, Self-Help Program Manager, says, “The HMC goes beyond just capturing the current condition of the home. While that is a crucial element, we also focus on educating about routine maintenance; including discussing what the homeowner can do themselves. We also share various community resources that exist that may be helpful, including the HRS Fix-it School workshops and Repair Program.” Art Schmeeling, who became HRS’s lead inspector in early 2022, considers the inspections to be an invaluable tool, sharing, “I think the secret sauce of the HMC is the running conversation I have with each homeowner as I inspect the inside and outside of their home. It is very educational, and I always include advice on different maintenance strategies and solutions.”

*Repair Team Feature - continued*

With a new roof installed, Jessie’s house is ready to play host to more good memories. And she is not alone. With the help of funding partners like Amplify GR and others, last year, Home Repair Services assisted 177 homeowners like Jessie with leaking roofs.



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# Counseling: Cases Rise but Tax Foreclosures at 21-Year Low

Over the last year, Kent County has witnessed a significant surge in foreclosure cases primarily due to pandemic driven economic challenges and job losses. Families who had once dreamed of a stable life in their home were finding themselves at risk of losing everything. However, thanks to the Housing Counseling Program team of Home Repair Services working collaboratively with the Kent County Treasurer's Office and Legal Aid of Western Michigan, Kent County recently reported a 21-year low in tax foreclosures.

Alisa Flores, the Housing Counseling & Financial Education Program Manager, along with Housing Counselor, Amber Jones, approach each case as determined advocates fighting for a family's home and future. Alisa shared, "We evaluate each family's unique situation and work to help them understand their rights and explain their options including assisting them in applying for any "catch-up" resources that may be available at the local or state level." Navigating the complex world of foreclosure requires expertise and these dedicated professionals give residents hope, showing them that they are not alone in their struggles.

The partnership between HRS, the Kent County Treasurer's Office, and Legal Aid of Western Michigan allows homeowners to become aware of existing resources and access a wider range of services. Legal Aid provides legal expertise to homeowners facing complex legal challenges and the Kent County Treasurer's Office works creatively to provide flexible payment plans and explore alternative solutions to keep people in their homes. Throw in the critical one-on-one counseling expertise from HRS, and it really is possible to manage foreclosures with a strategy of collaboration and communication.

In commenting on the positive outcomes that buck state and national trends, Joel Ruiter, HRS Executive Director, said, "It was rewarding to receive word of record low property seizures. Especially at a time when caseloads have been heading significantly higher, it shows what can happen when organizations with specific expertise are committed to working together with a shared goal to save homes. We thank these partner agencies, and we thank our funders whose support makes it possible."

Since entering foreclosure counseling in 2001, Home Repair Services' relentless efforts have helped over 3,000 homeowners avoid the spiraling effects of foreclosure. Families once facing the nightmare of foreclosure have found brighter days, rebuilding their hopes. Ruiter commented, "It can be easy to reduce the program's successes to mere statistics, but each case is the rekindling of a dream, the restoration of hope, and an opportunity to build generational wealth."

## HRS hosts Show Me the Money Day

Earlier this summer, Home Repair Services once again hosted Show Me the Money Day, an interactive community event designed to connect Kent County residents to resources that promote financial well-being and stability. A total of 69 attendees took part in a variety of workshops on credit, budgeting, home buying and more. In addition to delicious breakfast and lunch offerings provided by local establishments, there were a number of financial institutions, non-profit partners, and other organizations on hand to offer their products and resources to those in attendance.



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

## PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Cynthia & Joe Lehman



When Cynthia & Joe Lehman began thinking of ways to honor the memory of her late father, Dan Wood, making a legacy gift to Home Repair Services quickly rose to the top.

Dan Wood was a master plumber who dedicated over 50 years of his life to helping homeowners solve plumbing, electrical, and heating issues in metro Detroit. He was not only a skilled craftsman but also a compassionate soul who believed in giving back to the community that had supported him throughout his career. As he built his business, raised his close-knit family, and was active in his church parish, he became well-known for his technical skills, customer service, and commitment to helping those in need.

“He would have loved it if there was Home Repair Services of Detroit,” said Cynthia. “When I came to Grand Rapids to attend Aquinas College and then stayed after graduation, he and mom were not too happy with my decision. But later after I discovered HRS and became personally involved as a volunteer, he began to see what makes this community special and why I wanted to stay. In addition to helping lower-income people fix plumbing, electrical, and heating issues, he also appreciated that the roots of HRS could be traced back to the faith community. Faith was important to my parents, and it is important to Joe and me.”

When Cynthia met with Chris Romero, Director of Operations and Partnerships at HRS, to explore ideas for a legacy gift, it didn't take long to settle on what to use the gift for. The first suggestion Chris shared was to fund the purchase of a dynamic piece of construction equipment – a Kubota Utility Loader. Chris explained how it would effortlessly bore holes in the ground to set the countless posts on the 45-50 wheelchair access ramps that HRS builds each year. “I was immediately drawn to the Kubota because I know the impact that access ramps have for homeowners with mobility challenges, especially seniors. And when I saw it was orange – my dad's favorite color – I thought, this is it,” Cynthia said with a chuckle. “When I came home and shared the idea with Joe, he was all in.”

The addition of this new equipment will not only expedite the construction process but also ensure that Home Repair Services can serve more families in need of safe access. Cynthia's thoughtful gift is both a tribute to her father's lifelong vocation and his commitment to helping others. And it reflects the spirit of community and generosity that binds us all together.

## Why We Support HRS

“At Universal Forest Products, we believe in the dignity of self-sufficiency; of being independent and a productive member of one's community. That's why we are passionate about supporting organizations that help people help themselves; that provide a hand-up rather than a hand-out. Home Repair Services helps homeowners maintain and improve their homes, which helps their families, contributes to the pride of ownership that too few people can experience these days, and gives people skills for life.

We are honored to be able to support an organization that demonstrates its success and that operates as a charity should – with integrity, prudent stewardship of resources, purpose, and demonstrated outcomes. For these reasons and more, we support Home Repair Services and maintain our gratitude for all they do in and for our community.”

- Lynn Afendoulis, Director of Corporate Communications & Community Relations



We extend our heartfelt thanks to Cynthia and Joe for this incredible gift and for sharing her father's enduring legacy with us. We look forward to witnessing the positive impact of this gift as it transforms the lives of those it will serve.



# news from HOME



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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](mailto:snicolet@homerepairservices.org)

### Upcoming 2024 Lunch & Learn Dates

Friday, January 19      Friday, March 15      Friday, May 17      Friday, July 19  
Friday, February 16      Friday, April 19      Friday, June 21      Friday, August 16



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