



## REPAIR TEAM FEATURE: A Safer Bath for Dorothy

At 83, Dorothy treasures the small ranch-style home she purchased in 2016 in Comstock Park. Living solely on her Social Security income, she is determined to remain there as long as possible. With everything on one level, the layout is ideal for her age — but like many older adults, safety in the bathroom was a growing concern.

Her original bathroom, built in the late 1980s, included a combination tub and shower unit. As balance becomes more challenging with age, getting in and out of a bathtub can pose a serious safety risk — the leading cause of death for people over 60 is complications from a fall. To make matters worse for Dorothy, the faucet controls were inconveniently located on the same side as the adjacent toilet, forcing her to lean awkwardly across it to turn on and adjust the water. The bathtub height and poorly placed faucet had become a serious hazard. Fortunately, Dorothy knew exactly where to turn for help.

When Home Repair Services was called in, lead bath modification carpenter Dina Rowland carefully studied the layout. With the help of our trusted partners at Cherry Valley Plumbing, the water and drain lines were rerouted, allowing the shower controls to be installed on the opposite wall. Dina then completed the installation of the low-threshold shower, added several sturdy grab bars, and finished the space with thoughtful details designed to maximize safety.

The results were life-changing for Dorothy. She now has a safe, accessible shower that allows her to remain independent in her home. While no one can predict if or when she might need higher levels of care that could require a move, this modification significantly improves her ability to safely age in place in her current home.

The project also became a family affair. Dorothy's adult daughter, intrigued by Dina's work, asked if she could give it a try. After

a few pointers, she picked up a cordless drill and helped secure sheetrock for her mother's new shower. Ever the teacher, Dina watched with delight as her new assistant got to work.

Now in her 12th year on the Repair Team staff, Dina reflected on her approach to working with elderly homeowners, "My approach starts with treating each homeowner as if they're my own mom or grandma. I also want their input to guide my decisions on where to put the grab bars. Every little detail matters in keeping them safe."

HRS completed 49 bathroom conversions like Dorothy's last year. Looking ahead, Executive Director Joel Ruitter emphasizes the growing importance of this work: "As we begin to feel the full impact of the aging baby boom generation, the demand for safe, affordable, elder-friendly housing will only increase.

*continued on page 3*



HBA Foundation provides another generous gift supporting access ramps.



MSUFCU partners with HRS teaching financial education.



Beautiful new tools donated to HRS by Milwaukee Tool.



HRS opens space for a design workshop led by Disability Advocates of Kent County.



Feyen Zylstra volunteers do a learn & work at HRS.



Annual Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast feast.

# Record Crowd Enjoys 2025 Impact Celebration Party

- Presenting Sponsor: **Old National Bank**
- Beverage Sponsor: **First Merchants Bank**
- Dessert Sponsor: **ChoiceOne Bank**
- Gold Sponsors: **Independent Bank, Horizon Bank, LMCU, Macatawa Bank, MSU Federal Credit Union, Standard Supply & Lumber, West Michigan Community Bank, Zeeland Lumber & Supply.**
- A packed house gathered in the Home Repair Services outer lobby
- Tours of the HRS Cabinet Shop, hand painted mural, updated history panels, new electric vans, and East Room (removed capitalizations)
- A celebration of our collective impact during the 2025/26 fiscal year
- A feast of food and drink provided by Two Scotts Barbecue, a variety of local beverages, and Everything Bundt “Bundtini” Cakes



Save these dates and plan on joining us!

**The 2026 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration**  
 March 12, 2026. 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm  
 Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

**The 2026 Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast**  
 April 15, 2026. 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.**

# From Curious Beginner to Confident DIYer: Karen’s Fix-It School Journey

“I don’t remember exactly how I first heard about Home Repair Services, but I’m so glad I did,” Karen recalls. “I took the plumbing and electrical classes about 15 years ago after our youngest child bought a foreclosed house that needed a lot of work.”

Those classes—and the confidence they built—became the springboard for countless DIY projects, first on her child’s home and later on her own. When asked what she tackled directly because of the Fix-It School, Karen doesn’t hesitate: “Let’s see—I learned how to run a new shower line, swap out a sink, and remove, clean, and reinstall a toilet. I also mastered rewiring outlets and even changing lighting fixtures—all from what I learned at HRS.”

“I always knew I had some mechanical ability,” she says, “but these classes really opened my eyes to what I could do myself. The biggest gift was the confidence I gained in trusting my own skills.”

As her list of successful projects grew, so did her curiosity. Karen began researching and taking on even bigger challenges. “I’ve made mistakes, of course,” she admits, “but I still learned from them. Eventually, I was tiling floors and backsplashes, hanging blinds, replacing sections of our deck—even laying vinyl flooring.”

For Mike Zamarron, Self-Help Program Manager at HRS, stories like Karen’s are exactly what the Fix-It School is designed to create. “Our teaching approach is built on making an accessible experience for all—from the topics we cover (and those we don’t), to who teaches them (often fellow DIYers), to the way we combine props and practice. When someone can leave a class and apply what they learned successfully at home, we know we’ve done our job.”

For Karen, the confidence she gained has even extended beyond home repairs. “I replaced the burned-out brake light on my husband’s car after watching a YouTube video. But even that I credit to the Fix-It School, because it gave me the belief that I could figure it out. It’s amazing what confidence can lead to.”

Karen’s story is just one example of the life-changing, practical impact the Fix-It School delivers. Last year alone, nearly 1,800 people filled a seat at one of 82 free workshops—gaining the skills, confidence, and independence to save money and take better care of their homes.

*Repair Team Feature - continued*

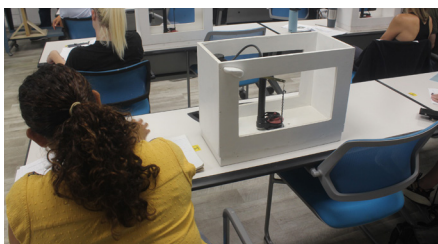
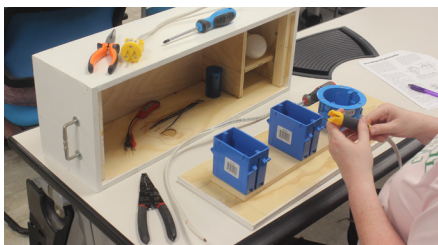
As a society, we will have no choice but to convert existing homes in this way — many of which were built when life expectancies were much lower and little thought was given to the needs of older adults. We’re going to be busy.”



*Dina Rowland HRS Bath Modification Specialist Carpenter*



*It all starts with removing the existing bathtub.*



Follow us on social media.



# Your Life in a Binder: Planning for the Unexpected

Last year, our Housing Counseling & Financial Education team introduced a new workshop called *Your Life in a Binder*—and it quickly became one of our most popular offerings. Originally part of our Smart Money University series for adults over 60, the workshop generated such enthusiasm that participants began asking for all-ages sessions. We listened, expanding the workshop to everyone and even offering our first session in Spanish.

So, what is *Your Life in a Binder*? The idea comes from real-life experience. HRS Housing Counselor Amber Jones lost several family members unexpectedly in recent years and saw firsthand how overwhelming it can be for surviving loved ones to manage financial affairs in the midst of grief. From locating wills and life insurance policies to accessing bank accounts, power of attorney documents, or funeral plans, she witnessed how difficult it can be to pull the pieces together when nothing is organized in advance.

Amber explains: “This workshop provides a safe, practical way to talk about preparing for the unexpected. Participants learn how to organize important personal, financial, and legal details into one accessible binder—or whatever system works best for them. The binder may include estate plans, healthcare directives, insurance information, account details, and even social media access. Having everything in one place not only reduces stress, but also gives loved ones peace of mind at a very difficult time.”

Alisa Flores, Housing Counseling & Financial Education Program Manager, has seen the consequences when these documents aren’t in place. She says: “Each year, we encounter situations where an heir is told they’ll receive a home after a loved one’s passing, only to discover there was no documentation to guarantee it. Those are difficult and heartbreaking conversations because our ability to help is limited at that point. *Your Life in a Binder* can be a springboard—not only to gather documents, passwords, and account information in one shared location, but also to encourage families to put the proper legal documents in place.”

Although talking about death can feel uncomfortable, Amber emphasizes the importance of starting the conversation early: “Attending *Your Life in a Binder*—and then actually doing it—is really a gift to those you love.”

Looking ahead to next year, there’s an added bonus: thanks to a grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, every workshop attendee will receive a handy *End of Life Planner*—helping to organize and guide the process so it can be started right away. Is your life in a binder? Join us for a future workshop and take the first step toward peace of mind for yourself and your loved ones. A little preparation now can make a lasting difference.

**The next scheduled *Your Life in a Binder* workshop is taking place on December 8, 2025, at Home Repair Services from 12:00 noon to 1:30 pm. The session is free and includes lunch. Please contact Alisa Flores at [aflores@homerepairservices.org](mailto:aflores@homerepairservices.org) or (616) 241-2601 ext. 239 to reserve your seat today.**



## Annual Financial Education a Event Success

For the fourth consecutive year, Home Repair Services hosted *Show Me the Money Day*, an interactive community event aimed at connecting Kent County residents with resources to support financial well-being and stability. More than 60 attendees participated in a variety of workshops covering topics such as credit, budgeting, home buying, and entrepreneurship. This year, workshops were offered in both English and Spanish to increase accessibility. Guests enjoyed a delicious lunch from a local caterer, with plenty of free swag and door prizes. Additionally, a resource fair featured over 20 financial institutions, nonprofit partners, and other organizations ready to share their products and resources with the community.

**Make plans to join us next year: May 16, 2026**



PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE:  
**Mike Zamarron**



This past August, Home Repair Services celebrated Mike Zamarron’s 17th anniversary on staff. Today he serves as our Self-Help Program Manager, but his journey with HRS began with a few big life decisions, including a career change and a move to Grand Rapids. After two decades in commercial and residential construction in the St. Johns area, Mike was ready for a new season of life that came with some bold steps. He bought a home in the Midtown neighborhood, enrolled in classes at Grand Rapids Community College, and began volunteering at HRS—a role that soon grew into a part-time position helping procure donated materials to stock the shelves of the former Builders Abundance Store.

From there, Mike’s responsibilities steadily grew. He became a full-time staff member, supporting a wide variety of programs, including Home Builders Association ramp builds, launching the successful Home Maintenance Check-Up inspections, and teaching in our Fix-It School. Over the last decade, his impact has been especially significant—he coordinated the reopening of the HRS cabinet shop, expanded its footprint, added new equipment, and elevated the sophistication of the cabinets being produced. When longtime staff member B.J. Jordan retired in 2020, Mike’s transition into leadership was both well-earned and seamless.

Mike’s creativity and vision are on display in a variety of ways at HRS. All of our Self-Help programs bear witness to his deep belief in the power of education. He is relentlessly positive, always encouraging, and has a gift for cheering people on as they grow in confidence and skill.

Beyond education, Mike plays a key role in stewarding the HRS facility, making sure our “home” is well cared for. He also serves as the lead designer for our Remodeling Together Program, where his talent for transforming difficult spaces into beautiful, functional kitchens shines. Remodeling Together clients also appreciate his patience, knowledge, and encouraging spirit. Volunteers value Mike for his genuine care and the way he involves them in the shop’s operations.

Reflecting on his move to Grand Rapids, Mike says, “There could not have been a better place for me to put my years of construction knowledge to such good use than Home Repair Services—and it just so happened to be in the city I had just moved to.” Thanks, Mike, for all you do to make a difference for so many!

Why We Support HRS

“Our partnership with Home Repair Services continues to do great things. We’re excited to see how these funds will strengthen our community.”



- Dawn Bredeweg  
 Manager of Corporate Giving & Hospitality



SpartanNash team members have volunteered to construct seven ramps since April of 2024.



Please consider financially supporting the work of Home Repair Services at [www.homerepairservices.org](http://www.homerepairservices.org) or use the QR Code.

# news from HOME



1100 S. Division Ave.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49507  
616.241.2601  
www.homerepairservices.org

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Grand Rapids, MI  
Permit No. 793

## 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 Erin Schlaud at 616-241-2601 ext. 102 or [eschlaud@homerepairservices.org](mailto:eschlaud@homerepairservices.org)

### Upcoming 2025 Lunch & Learn Dates

Friday, January 16	Friday, March 20	Friday, May 15	Friday, July 17
Friday, February 20	Friday, April 17	Friday, June 19	Friday, August 21



<p><b>BOARD MEMBERS</b></p> <p><b>ADAM HOMAN – Chair</b> National Nail</p> <p><b>ELZIE HONICUTT – Vice Chair</b> Davenport University</p> <p><b>MADLINE “MADDIE” SCHAAB – Secretary</b> Living Stones Academy</p>	<p><b>CARINA MARQUEZ-VANDERMEER – Treasurer</b> Priority Health</p> <p><b>TERESA SCHISSLER – BOICHOT</b> Boichot Insurance Agency, LLC</p> <p><b>JENNIFER “JEN” RANDALL</b> Corewell Health</p> <p><b>BEV BOERMAN</b> Retired - Five Star Real Estate</p>	<p><b>JOHN VAN THOLEN</b> Van Tholen &amp; Associates</p> <p><b>JAMES JUDGE</b> Huntington National Bank</p> <p><b>JIM PATTON</b> Siemens Digital Industries Software</p> <p><b>LESLIE “LES” MORANT</b> Morant Law PLLC</p>	<p><b>TONY GROSSA</b> BHS Insurance</p> <p><b>EMILY QUELLET</b> DeHaan Homes</p> <p><b>BRIAN WALLS</b> Macatawa Bank</p>
---	---	---	--