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Feature Home

(ON THE COVER)

17

This feature home hews to builder Jim Roberts' simple philosophy, "When you build a lake home, it needs to be designed to fit on the lot and take full advantage of the view." The homeowner had been eyeing the wildly irregular lot for some time before having this Parade of Homes award winner built.



7

Casa Bolero's Stuffed Jalapeños



9

Buying Quality Furniture



12

The Kalamazoo Civic Theatre



25

Seniors Moving On



28

Heating Options and Efficiency

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It's all about you *Kalamazoo*

Ten things I Love about Kalamazoo,
by David Buskirk

- Some of the best medical care facilities in the country. We not only take care of our young and our elderly, we are constantly working to help the most unfortunate in the community.
- The co-exist atmosphere with two metropolitan areas, such as are present with both the City of Kalamazoo and the City of Portage.
- A let's get along attitude amongst all elected and appointed officials within the county. Things get done here with public and private input, and transparency.
- Beyond doubt the best education systems in the country, from pre-school to higher education, there is no better place to receive an education. This shows in the amount of people that remain in the community generation after generation. They want to be from Kalamazoo.
- Our ability to reach beyond social and economic boundaries and work together to help one and all. Our housing and public transportation programs are great examples of working together for the betterment of all.
- Our great abundance of entertainment and the celebration of the arts. There is always someplace to go or something to see in Kalamazoo County.
- Home of a great Car Museum and Air Museum.
- The best Brew Pubs and Neighborhood Bars/Restaurants in the Country.
- Our community's ability to rise above tough times and be a leader in innovative ideas. Having the first pedestrian mall is a good example.
- Kalamazoo County carries itself very high in its ability to accomplish goals, but we still have the small town appeal. Kind of like the TV show Cheers. Everybody knows everyone and will walk across the street to make sure they say "Hi," no matter their socio-economic stature in life.



County Commissioner Dave Buskirk and wife Toni have been married for 40 years, and raised their two daughters in Kalamazoo.

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Celebrate Good Food

Casa Bolero

Bacon Wrapped Stuffed Jalapeños with Raspberry Sauce

If you're in the mood for a relaxed dining experience with exceptional cuisine, great service and a vibrant atmosphere, check out Casa Bolero. Located in downtown Kalamazoo, Casa Bolero is a latin caribbean small plates restaurant and tequila bar. They may best be known for their table-side guacamole, a dish where fresh ingredients are brought to your table and prepared just for you. The menu has a diverse array of dishes that will be sure to please everyone.

Homemade lime mix made fresh daily has made the restaurant a popular place for the Margarita lover, and over 80 tequilas are offered to their guests. A full bar and a variety of bottled beer is also available.

What you will need:

Frying oil
15-20 large jalapeños
15-20 strips of bacon
Toothpicks
1 lb of cream cheese
roughly 3/4 cup of Boursin cheese
1/2 cup of shredded pepper jack cheese
1/2 cup of cooked chorizo sausage
2 tablespoons of southwest seasoning

For raspberry sauce:

2 tablespoons of champagne vinegar
2 tablespoons of sugar
large pinch of chopped cilantro
3 pints of fresh raspberries
3/4 cup of water

Preparation:

Cut down the outside curve of the jalapeño from top to bottom and de-seed all the jalapeños. A common potato peeler works best. Set aside jalapeños.

In a large mixing bowl add all your cheeses, chorizo, and seasoning. Use a kitchen stand mixer if you have one, otherwise a pair of latex gloved hands are the next best thing. Once thoroughly mixed put the cheese mixture in the fridge to set. Also it is easier to mold and work with when its refrigerated.

While the cheese is setting, puree together the the raspberries, vinegar, sugar, cilantro, and water. Be careful not to over puree the sauce. It's ok if it is not perfectly smooth.

Form the cheese into a roll a little larger than a double A battery and stuff it into the pepper. Be sure the jalapeño is full and squeeze out any extra cheese. The fullness of the peppers help with the frying.

Once all the peppers are stuffed, you can wrap them each with a piece of bacon. Use 2-3 toothpicks per pepper to hold the bacon in place. This also helps to keep the jalapeño closed during frying.

No batter needed, just fry each jalapeño for 5-7 minutes or longer if needed. If using a stove top burner, medium high heat setting is suggested. The bacon should appear crispy but not too dark. Just start with one to get the timing down if unsure.

Once all the jalapeños are finished, drizzle with the raspberry sauce and enjoy!



For a full menu, directions and hours, visit www.casabolerozkoo.com or call 269-382-3148

Photography by
Linda Hoard

Do Customers Really Care About Being Green?

With everyone talking about this whole sustainability kick and the whole "going green" trend, haven't we all forgotten to ask an important question for any business? Do customers actually care if a company is being green or creating green products or offering green services? I mean, we can spend all the time, energy and finances we want on making our business play nice with the environment, but if the people who buy what we're selling don't care, why on earth would we waste our time? So, why don't we answer this question before going any further. Do customers care about being green? YES! And most importantly, We Care.

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Photo courtesy of Flair Interiors

Quality Furniture: Here Today, Heirloom Tomorrow

By Kaye Bennett

If you want a piece of quality furniture, one which will last your lifetime and likely attain heirloom status, here are three words you should look for: "Made in U.S.A."

Historically, says Steve VanderWoude, owner of Liberty Square Furniture, several southern states were the hub of fine, hand-crafted furniture in this country. But now many of those operations have shifted overseas, often to China or Vietnam. In some cases, owners of the companies are still American, says Tim Green, who, with his wife Ava, owns Flair Interiors, and they may maintain some degree of control over procedures and quality. Sometimes, parts are shipped from Asia and then assembled in the U.S. But even in these cases, craftsmanship and variety are sacrificed for speed and low cost.

Assembling furniture, particularly upholstered pieces like sofas and chairs and recliners, on a factory line, rather than by hand, decreases quality in a number of ways, says Green. When furniture is manufactured overseas, it has to be simple. That cuts the cost, but it also limits the choices customers can make in style, color, pattern and design.

Both Liberty Square and Flair seek out manufacturers who provide the bench-made, customizable quality they want for their customers. One of the Greens' favorite suppliers, Smith

Brothers of Berne, Indiana, was founded in 1926. Smith Brothers, says Green, "... won't compromise." Their sofa and chair frames are made of solid maple, with corner blocks and double dowel corners. Legs are built in, not screwed on, and both the spring system and foam cushions are of high quality.

Becky Johnson is business manager of VanDenBerg and Sons Furniture, Inc. She says that VanDenBerg carries furniture from a number of U.S. suppliers, including Flexsteel, which is headquartered in Dubuque, Iowa. Flexsteel's steel support framework, she says, is what distinguishes it from cheaper manufacturers.

Much of the wood furniture that Liberty Square and VanDenBerg's sell comes from Amish craftsmen, most of them located in Ohio. VanderWoude estimates that about 80 percent of U.S.-made wood furniture now comes from the Amish, many of whom, he adds, now have sales representatives and participate at furniture trade shows. Johnson points out that lower production overhead allows Amish craftsmen to offer a variety of price ranges.

While the cost of a discount sofa might start at \$399, Green says, and a bench-made, top model at \$1000 or more, the real differences show up over time. Quality pieces offer longer,

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Photo courtesy of VanDenBerg and Sons Furniture





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Green says that sometimes a customer will base their buying decision on price, but that his company prefers selling good furniture. "I would rather lose the sale than lose their respect when it breaks down in five years." While the big box stores just advertise their prices and their sales, Green says, Flair sees people over and over, sometimes for generations, and he doesn't want them to be disappointed.

Style and design, says VanderWoude, can also distinguish timeless furniture from trendy. Straight lines and the use of a single color woods, rather than two-tones, will probably extend the length of time the owner likes (or loves!) a piece of furniture. But, he adds, taste is a tricky thing to predict. "Thirty years ago," he says, "we all thought orange shag carpet looked good."

Even with wood furniture, such as dining room sets or desks, popularity of certain colors can fizzle out. Light oak, so "in" 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, says VanderWoude, now looks pretty dated, since people are preferring darker stains.

Many younger people, says VanderWoude, far from being turned off by throw-away furniture, are attracted to the concept of disposables. (Witness the phenomenon of IKEA.) Green agrees: With people marrying later, changing jobs and relocating frequently, and buying homes later, many simply aren't ready to start thinking about good furniture until they're well into their 30s or even later. Sometimes, says Johnson, they find it easier to offload furniture rather than move it, so they'll buy cheap pieces with the intention of buying new, cheap pieces in the next place their job takes them.

Steve VanderWoude concludes that, in his opinion, over time it doesn't cost that much more to buy a piece of quality furniture than it does to keep buying "... particle board that's screwed together."



Photo courtesy of Liberty Square Furniture



Photo courtesy of Flair Interiors



Peter Pan 2013

Kalamazoo Civic Theatre:

Where the Show Will Always Go On

By Zinta Aistars

Photos courtesy of The Kalamazoo Civic Theatre

When Ben Zylman, marketing director for the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre at 329 South Park Street, steps outside the theatre doors to take a walk through Bronson Park or downtown Kalamazoo, it doesn't take long for someone to stop him to share fond memories.

"People stop me on the street and tell me how they recall coming to the Civic as a kid," Zylman smiles. "So many in Kalamazoo grew up taking part in the Junior Civic. Or someone will recite a poem they learned here, even though it might have been years and years ago. Generations have passed through this theatre."

Zylman loves that kind of legacy. He was a young man himself when he first stepped into the Civic, and the passion for civic theatre has been with him since early childhood. His first show on this stage was in 1978, and by 1998, he was on staff.

"Having grown up here, I assumed everyone had a civic theatre like this," he says. "It wasn't until I traveled elsewhere that I realized how special our theatre is. I found smaller venues, and they just weren't the same caliber."

The Kalamazoo Civic Theatre is celebrating its 86th season in 2014, with more than 35,000 theatre enthusiasts in attendance every season. With an annual budget of almost \$2,000,000 the Civic employs 35 full- and part-time employees and 1,000 volunteers, along with dozens of professionals who work on a contractual basis.

Kalamazoo Civic Theatre has been in operation since 1929, when Dr. W. E. Upjohn purchased the property on the southwest corner of Bronson Park. At that time, a Victorian home could be found on that corner, belonging to community leader Hezekiah Wells. The Civic Theatre organization used the Wells' home as their first headquarters, while holding



performances at the Kalamazoo Central High School auditorium.

"Dr. Upjohn didn't want his daughter, Dorothy Dalton, to live in Greenwich Village in New York," Zylman tells the story. "He built a professional-level theatre here to bring her home."

Along with Dorothy Dalton, founders include Norman Carver Sr., Howard Chenery, Arthur Kohl, Frances Hall Kohl, Paul Fuller and Louise Carver. When the Wells' house was razed to make room for the new Civic Theatre, the group moved to their temporary headquarters at the Ladies Library Association, just behind today's theatre.

"Aymar Embury II, an architect from New York, was hired to design the new building," says Zylman. "He was the same architect who designed the original library at Kalamazoo College and the Congregational Church across Bronson Park."

Zylman points to the front doors and windows of the building. Indiana limestone is trimmed with swags of scarlet marble that arch up and over the entrances, giving the impression of entering a circus tent. Black Belgian marble decorates second floor windows with arches. Inside, 521 seats awaited the audience for the theatre's first production—*The Constant Wife*—but were later reduced to 503 when a sound room was added. Business offices were added in the 1970s.

A building alone does not a theatre make. The stage, surrounded by green velvet drapes, has rarely been silent in all of those 85 years. Productions, including lavish musicals, have been consistent throughout. In the 1950s, full-length motion pictures were also shown on stage.

"The Civic has been held in high regard at a national level," says Zylman. The award-winning drama, *A Raisin in the Sun*, was staged at the Civic for its first community theatre showing in 1961 and became a huge hit, barely able to keep up with the demand for tickets. "And we were the first to be granted permission and licensed to produce Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*."

Zylman rattles off a long list of productions (*The Imaginary Invalid*, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Forever Plaid*, *Avenue Q*, *Teahouse of the August Moon*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, and more, with a list of awards



nearly as long), but then he turns to another important aspect of the Civic: it's intern program.

"We employ seven interns in five disciplines," he says. "Costume design; lighting, sound and SFX design; scenic design; stage management; and technical direction. It was through our internships that Jack Ragotzy met his wife, and they later opened the Barn Theatre in Augusta."

Zylman sees no slowing down for the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre. Quite the opposite. Even as the world of entertainment undergoes technological changes, "the theatrical experience is unlike any other," he says. "You can sit at home and watch a movie, or go to a movie theatre, but when you go to a movie, notice how people sit as far away from each other as possible. At the theatre, people like to sit close and talk to each other. Theatre is community."

Even as Kalamazoo is rich with theatre, from academic theatres to theatre on wheels, each type has its own niche, Zylman says. The Kalamazoo Civic Theatre has proven its longevity.

"Yes, some people think we even have our own ghost," Zylman says. "Whenever something goes wrong at the Civic,



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My Fair Lady, October 2014

one of us will say—oh, it's Thelma again!"

Thelma is the theatre ghost, and she's a friendly if mischievous presence. For her, the show must go on, and it never ends.

To learn more about the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre, its classes, workshops, and season subscriptions, visit kazoocivic.com.



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By Zolton Cohen
Photography by Casey Spring

The feature home in this issue of Welcome Home Magazine hews to builder Jim Roberts' simple philosophy, "When you build a lake home, it is automatically a custom home. So it needs to be designed to fit on the lot and take full advantage of the view."

The nearly-5,400 square foot home on the shores of Crooked Lake in Texas Township certainly lives up to that way of thinking. The windows in the home total 1,400 square feet; the same dimension, Roberts says, as the floor area of a typical mid-range house. And each of the four bedrooms, as well as most of the other rooms in the house, has a spectacular view down the length of Crooked Lake.

A WATER-LOVER'S PLACE ON THE LAKESIDE

The homeowner says he had been eyeing the wildly irregular lot for some years with the idea of someday building a home on the property. He says, "I lived in a much smaller house in town, but I have always liked the water and always wanted to build on it."

He had an interest in boating, and owned a vessel that he kept moored on Lake Michigan. However, he says, "Being on my own lake is so different. On Lake Michigan there were only



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a limited number of times I could use the boat, between going there and checking to see if the weather was OK and making sure the waves weren't six feet high. Now, as long as the weather is nice I can just walk out the back door and be on the water."

A water skier, the owner also uses the lakefront for entertaining. "It's nice that my sister's kids can come and play in the lake, and there is enough room in the house for them to stay. When they used to come to Lake Michigan from Detroit, where we grew up, they would have to rent a house. Now they don't have to. And there is no rip current or big waves on an inland lake, so it's safer for the kids. They love it."

ENERGY EFFICIENCY AT THE FOREFRONT

Roberts is a builder who takes pride in constructing some of the most energy efficient homes in the region, and he didn't spare the horses in that regard with this lakeside dwelling. One of the key





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pieces of equipment he likes to put in larger sized homes is a geothermal heat pump heating and cooling system. "Ground-source heat pumps," he says, "extract heat or cooling from the earth and transfer it to the house via tubing buried in the ground outside. This home required more than a mile of tubing, run in several layers."

Although geothermal installations represent a significant expenditure up front, in the long run, in a house larger than 3,000 or so square feet, they can make economic sense, Roberts says. Large homes can require up to three gas furnaces to adequately and accurately heat and cool the large volume of space. But by going with a high capacity geothermal system, Roberts says he can do the job with two units.

Insulation, air sealing and windows also play important parts in the efficiency of a home. Roberts says, "On a lake, with plenty of glass and 5,000 plus square feet, you're going to have a lot of heat loss. You've got the wind howling across the ice in the winter and beating against the house." To reduce air infiltration and to retard thermal heat loss through the walls and ceilings, Roberts specified an inch and a half of closed cell spray foam insulation in the 2x6 sidewalls before filling the remainder of the space with cellulose fiber insulation. The foam cuts air infiltration to almost nothing, and the "hybrid" wall system, as Roberts calls it, yields an R-factor of about 23. The ceiling is insulated to R-50, and high end windows complete the energy efficiency package.

"We don't really pay much attention to the new energy efficiency minimum building code requirements," Roberts says,



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"because we exceed them by so much." The home was given a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) score of 46. The HERS scale goes from 0-150, with 100 being the standard, typical new home. A score of 46 indicates that the home is 53% more efficient than that standard house. It also won a Kalamazoo Parade of Homes award for Most Energy Efficient. The judge in that competition called it one of the most energy efficient homes in the state.

The expense and effort that went into making the home such a model of energy frugality has paid off. The owner says, "It's hard to believe, but with a house that is more than three times the size of my old one, I'm paying similar utility bills."

HOW THE HOUSE LIVES

Inside, the home has a solid and substantial feel. The floors and stairs do not creak or even move when walked upon. Where there isn't carpet or tile, shallow furrows on the hand-scraped maple floors pick up highlights of illumination coming in through the numerous windows. There is crown molding on many of the ten foot ceilings, and coffered and tray ceilings dress up different areas, lending even more detail and volume to the space. Backband molding around the door and window casings is a little bit of a throwback to an earlier age of building, and appropriate to the style of home.

The owner says he loves to cook and entertain, and the kitchen was evidently designed with that in mind. As befits a home of this scale, it is large enough to accommodate not one but two islands. A gigantic Kenmore stainless steel refrigerator takes up most of one wall.

The second floor bedrooms have even more dramatic lake views due to their height off the lakeshore. The owner's daughter's bedroom has pink walls, and, according to the owner, "the best view of the lake in the house" through a large picture window. Open and spacious floor plans on both levels of the house are large enough to warrant a robotic Roomba vacuum cleaner on each floor. "They work great," the owner says, "and are a timesaver in such a big house."

The master bedroom features his and her walk-in closets and an elevated deck that is just the right size for a morning coffee or evening nightcap. The master bath has a walk-in tile shower and a Jacuzzi tub large enough to accommodate several people. The owner's daughter, he says, likes to get in the tub in her swimsuit and play.

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Quick to cite the help he received when putting the house together, the owner complimented Roberts and architect Michael Blied for their attention to detail. He also was favorably impressed with Nikki Willis at the Kitchen Shop and Becky Marvin, the interior designer. "They can see things that you can't," he says. "Becky helped with picking out colors and a lot of other things. She's easy to deal with and a quick thinker. As a bonus, her price was reasonable."

There's a lot to like in this home, and that has not gone unnoticed. In addition to the Energy Efficiency award it garnered during the Parade of Homes Tour, it also won Best Kitchen and Best Interior Finish. It has an interesting design and layout, is large enough for entertaining and for overnight guests, and has been built from the ground up with energy efficiency top-of-mind.



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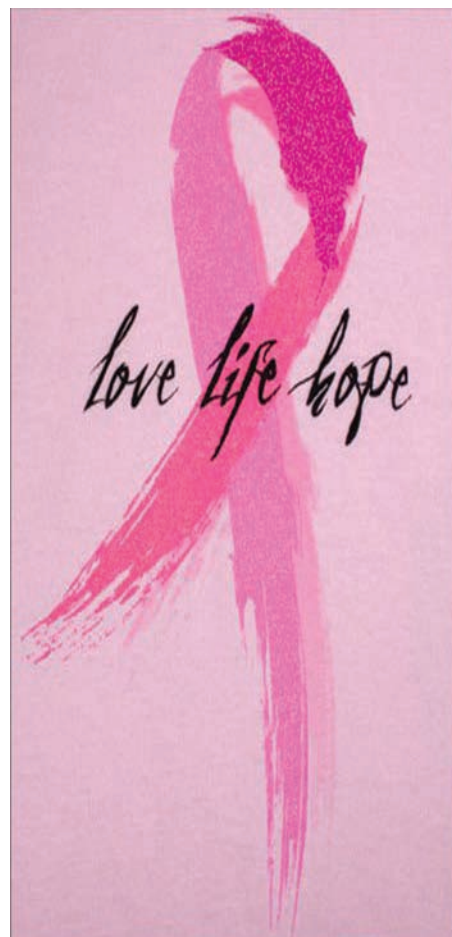
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Seniors, Moving On...To Where?

By Kaye Bennett

As a reader of Welcome Home, there's a good chance you own – or aspire to own – a home. And, as a member of the human race, there's an even better chance that you'll grow older and someday lose the desire or the ability to continue to care for that home.

When mowing and plowing and raking and overseeing a big house cease to be attractive, you have a lot of options for moving on in southwest Michigan.

CONDOS

Kathy Fosmoe is a realtor with Watts Realty Team, Keller Williams, and she's one of the few local realtors who specializes in condos. It's such a specialized field that Fosmoe has, for the past eight years, taught a class on the subject at the Portage Public Schools' community enrichment program.

Fosmoe helps people decide if condo living will be a comfortable fit for them. Many people, she says, like the idea that, as they did with their own homes, they are in control of their financial situation. Whether they pay a condo off immediately with proceeds from the sale of their house or take out a mortgage, they know how much they will owe every month.

Here are a few general tips Fosmoe gives to people considering a move to condos:

- With a condo, you own from the walls in; you don't need permission to change or redecorate on the inside.
- In addition to the purchase price for your condo (ranging, in southwest Michigan from \$20,000 to \$500,000), you will pay an association fee, which may be assessed monthly, quarterly, or biannually. Fees in this area range from \$130 to \$400 or more a

month. It's important to figure out what fees include, since they vary from one association to another, and to know what's important to you. If you don't need or want a clubhouse or pool, you'd be well advised to find a condo association that doesn't have those amenities; they will be included in your association fees, even if you don't use them.

- Currently in this area, just two condo associations, Leisure Pointe and Leisure Time, limit buyers to age 55 and older, though many other associations have a large number of senior owners.

- If you have a boat or trailer or fifth wheel, you'll have to find someplace else to store it and pay for that storage, as condo associations don't offer this.

- You need to be comfortable with the rules of the condo and willing to abide by them. Rules may include restrictions on pets, window treatments and garage doors.

- In addition to the cost of your condo and your monthly fees, there's likely to be a non-refundable buy-in fee, which can range from the amount of one month's fees to one percent of the purchase price.

- You need to purchase condo insurance, covering the inside of your condo, including such things as interior walls, counters, floors, and furniture.

- You pay property taxes on your condo, just like you did on your home.

- You own (and are responsible for) mechanicals, including the furnace, hot water heater, central air, water softener, garage door opener, and appliances.

- Some condos are free standing; others may be attached (duplex) or in groups of three or four. In some cases, they are apartment style (on top of each other).

There are about 50 different condo associations in the Kalamazoo area, says Fosmoe. Some are run by resident volunteer boards (self-managed) and others, by management companies. But there's no general listing of who's in charge of each, so the would-be condo buyer should enlist the services of a realtor to help navigate their options.

SENIOR APARTMENTS

Aimee Eva, is office manager of Hope Woods Apartments, located on Stadium Drive in Kalamazoo. Hope Woods is managed by Clearview Property Management Services, LLC.

Like other senior-targeted apartment groups in the area, Hope Woods has age restrictions. Residents, says Eva, must be at least 55; for more than one occupant, the head of the household must be 55 and the other, at least 50.

In addition to 150 apartments in a variety of styles and sizes, Hope Woods offers many amenities, including a hair salon; a movie theater; a social room with free morning coffee; dinner in the dining room Monday through Friday; a craft room, game room and fitness center; and a library. Rooms have private decks or patios, and medical emergency pull cords.

Eva says that Hope Woods's pricing structure is unique in the senior housing industry in that it offers both a conventional rate and a tax credit program for residents whose income falls in a certain range. For example, the conventional rent for a one-bedroom apartment at Hope Woods is \$863 a month, while those who qualify for the tax credit would pay \$645 for the same apartment. (Both rents include water, sewer and garbage service.)

But what makes Hope Woods special, says Eva, are the people who live there. They call themselves the "Hope Woods family," she says.

CONTINUUM OF CARE

This area has a number of communities that offer an escalating level of care. The best known are Friendship Village, the Fountains of Bronson Place, and the Heritage Community.

Betsy Standish is executive director of the Fountains of Bronson Place, which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year.

People are drawn to places like the Fountains because they are looking for community living, says Standish. People accustomed to an active life, with many friends, may find themselves lonely, if, for example, they've relocated to this area to be near family or if their own friends have moved away.

The Fountains offers a complete portfolio of living arrangements: The Town Center, for independent living, has 141 apartments, ranging from studios to two- and three-bedroom

floor plans. The Inn, a brand-new, \$1.1 million renovation, offers 20 assisted living apartments. The Gardens, their newest level of care program, offers 26 apartments for residents in need of memory care. The Springs is the skilled nursing/rehabilitation and long-term care center, with 43 beds in private and semi-private rooms.

The full monthly service fee at the Fountains's independent living apartments includes two meals a day, housekeeping, laundry and maintenance services, plus access to a huge variety of activities, both inside and outside the Fountains campus.

Health care staff at the Fountains includes nurses, caregivers, certified dementia care practitioners, and physical, occupational and speech therapists.

"Continuum" does not imply needing to leave one level before moving on to the next. If a resident living independently has a fall or elective surgery, for example, says Standish, and needs to go into the Springs for rehab, the goal is to return them to their previous level of function and back to their apartment.

Standish also points out that newcomers to the Fountains may enter the continuum at whatever level is appropriate for them. "They don't have to start at the independent living level," she says. "They can start at the assisted living, memory care, or skilled nursing/long term care level."

For residents with cars (many of the Town Center residents still have jobs), heated underground parking is available. For those who don't drive, transportation is provided.

Membership fees for Town Center apartments are based on apartment size and range from \$18,000 to \$85,000. Monthly fees range from \$1,600 to \$7,195, based on the plan of choice and square footage.

Not sure if the continuum of care option is right for you? That's why the Fountains offers "Try It. You'll Like It," says Standish. People are invited to stay in the Fountains's premium upgrade apartment for up to one week. It's free, and they can see how well the Fountains community fits their needs. The community also offers a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee for the first six months after a resident moves in. "We want our clients to be happy," says Standish. The most common comment she hears from Fountains residents, she says, is "I can't believe I waited so long to come here."





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HVAC and Fireplaces Trending Toward Efficiency

By Zolton Cohen

Several local contractors say that governmental energy efficiency mandates, as well as homeowner demands for greater efficiency and comfort, are driving innovation in the heating and cooling industry.

One example of those improvements, says Jim Penny, of Metzger's Heating and Cooling is the increasing number of furnaces on the market that offer variable burner settings. "In terms of comfort," he says, "there are now products that give you variable heat output down to 40% of the furnace's capacity when we're having mild weather. It can run way down low but then can stage itself up as need be, whether you're using the outdoor temperature as a benchmark or the homeowner's comfort." Such equipment can more accurately tailor a furnace's output to the indoor and outdoor conditions, Penny says, saving fuel by only burning what is needed to meet the thermostat setpoint.

Furnaces don't just burn gas and oil, points out Luke Vanderhill, of Nieboer Heating and Cooling. They also consume electricity to run the blower motor. "The improvements on the electric side of heating and cooling systems are pretty significant," he says. "Electrically commutated motors (ECM's) are a big force in the industry these days because of the increase in efficiency for the customer. Typically, you can just about make back the cost of the upgrade to a furnace with an ECM in the first year of operation; they can save that much on electricity charges. If you have central A/C with that system, you're saving in both summer and in winter. So that's why we pretty much only sell furnaces with ECM's now."

Heat pumps are also growing in popularity as their efficiency improves. Vanderhill says,

"We don't put in cooling-only units anymore. They're all heat pumps. So we benefit the customer in both heating and cooling seasons."

Vanderhill also says that demand has risen for ductless mini-split heat pumps for homes that have steam or hot water heat, and therefore lack ductwork. "They're also ideal for a three or four-season room that doesn't currently have any heating or cooling. The evaporator can be a wall console unit or ceiling mounted. The compressor is outside, and both it and the indoor fans are so quiet you can hardly hear them running. A mini-split delivers both heating and cooling, and it makes a lot of sense in many applications because it doesn't disturb the home in terms of trying to get ductwork to that room."

AIR QUALITY AND DUCTWORK SEALING

Penny points out that indoor air quality is an important part of the HVAC business, and improvements in air filtration equipment has made cleaner air much easier to deliver. "Newer electronic media filters both capture and kill, whereas the older type only used to kill whatever came across it; dust mites and microscopic stuff. Now, the electronic part of the unit zaps it and then it is caught in a charged media filter. Then you can pull out the filter and dispose of it and put a new one in."

Energy codes now require that ductwork installed in new homes be sealed at the joints. Penny says, "We have to put either mastic or tape around each joint in the duct to make sure there is no air leakage. We have always sealed ducts that pass through unconditioned spaces. And the old rule of thumb was that if the ducts leaked a bit in the basement, you didn't need to open a register down there. But now the codes mandate that

all joints have to be sealed no matter where they are. The idea behind it is to insure that all the conditioned air gets to where it is designed to go. We used to count on losing about 10% in leakage and it wasn't anything anyone worried about. But now, if you want 400 cubic feet per minute up to the second floor, we have to make sure all 400 cfm is making it up there. We use volumeters to measure that. With Energy Star homes you have to check between floors to see if anything is leaking between the two levels. It all has to be correctly balanced."

ANOTHER COUNTRY HEARD FROM

John Sackett, an installation and service specialist at Sackett's Fireplace, says there are still a lot of open-hearth and inefficient gas log fireplaces out there that could benefit from an upgrade to an insert type product.

Sackett says, "We specialize in converting those inefficient fireplaces from the 1960's, 70's or 80's into high efficiency wood or gas inserts. Our wood-burning inserts are about 85 % efficient and the gas ones are 70-74% efficient. If you have a gas log and you're using it every night, you'll see a pretty high gas bill. With a new insert you'll quickly see the savings."

Open fireplaces and flues are simply holes in the house that lead to the outdoors, so they leak conditioned air 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Sackett says. "Inserts are direct vent products," he says. "They draw combustion air from outside the house so you're not continually venting the air you paid to heat or cool." Additionally, Sackett says, "Older bifold fireplace doors have air going in and out of them all the time, so they collect dust and dirt. Sealed inserts have no air movement so they stay cleaner."

Sackett says that they sell approximately the same number of wood-burning inserts as gas ones. "Lifestyle, the age of the homeowner and geography all play a part in which they



Photo courtesy of Fireplace Xtrordinair

choose," he notes. "If they live in town and their lifestyle has kids and work and they don't have time to deal with wood but still like the look of the flame, gas is the way to go, especially with natural gas in town. But if you live in the country and have an abundance of wood and are used to doing the work, then wood or pellets would probably be a better solution."

At any rate, Sackett says, the quality of the installation is critical for safety. "Building a fire in someone's living room is a big deal, and we take it seriously."




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INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Abode Building Center	2
BrioLife Photography	30
Buy Local of Greater Kalamazoo	29
Catholic Schools of Greater Kalamazoo	6, 27
Cork Lane Decorating Center	15
Custom Steel Designs	20
DeHaan Remodeling Specialists	15
Expressions by Jan	6
Flair Interiors	10, 16
Glas Associates	31
Halls Closets & More	23
Integrated Smart Technologies	22
Interiors by Jane	22
The Lori Moore Show	6
Migala Carpet One	18
Overhead Door	30
Powell Custom Homes	14
Roberts Built Homes	32
Siding World	3
Vlietstra Bros. Pools & Spas	16
WMU Theatre	29
Your Fall Home Show	27

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