

Women get the job done on home improvement front

BY KRISTEN COUNTS
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Northern Michigan women are increasingly shopping at hardware stores and tackling home improvement projects.

Nationally, nearly 40 percent of home improvement product sales are to women, according to the Home Improvement Research Institute, and retailers are responding accordingly. Female do-it-yourselfers can now find tools and tool kits that are designed with the needs of the user in mind.

"I think women do a lot more home improvements than they ever used to," said Kathy, a cashier/price merchandiser at Gil-Roy's Hardware in Elk Rapids.

"More and more home improvements are being done by the wife because she doesn't want to wait for the husband to do it," laughed Brian Salisbury, power tool manager/buyer at Ace Hardware in Traverse City.

He said that female customers are wanting tools for themselves, adding, "My wife has her own tools so that she doesn't have to dig through my toolbox."

Standard-issue tools are heavy and cumbersome

for some women. Salisbury said that his wife owns tools that are lightweight, and floral-designed.

"There are flowered hammers and fancy, flowered screwdrivers," said Gil-Roy's cashier. "With flowers on them, you don't have to worry about the men borrowing them because they wouldn't be caught dead with them."

Turquoise-and-white toolbox kits filled with smaller, lightweight, ergonomic tools are available at Ace and other hardware stores. The female-friendly line of tools is manufactured by a company called Barbara K.

Salisbury said the store has three different kits — a 30-piece toolbox kit, an 11-piece craft kit, and a 10-piece picture-hanging kit. The kits are all priced under \$50.

Salisbury, who made the decision to carry the product line at Ace, said, "We really feel it's going to be a hot line. We're even looking at doing a ladies' night for tools, where women can come in for refreshments, get questions answered, and peruse the tools."

Mary Gribbin, a homeowner in Cedar, has been taking on a variety of home improvement projects for many years. She has done everything from building a workbench to installing a toilet to

replacing electric switches.

Like many women, Gribbin finds doing home repairs to be very rewarding. She said that she was particularly proud of herself when she successfully repaired a damaged ceiling. When someone came to her house, she said she would take them and show them her work, saying, "Look! Look! I fixed the ceiling!"

The Gil-Roy's cashier, who tackles her own home improvements, agreed—"There's a feeling of accomplishment when you can fix something yourself and not have someone help you or do it for you."

In addition to personal satisfaction, Gribbin mentioned another significant reward—"You can save a lot of money doing it yourself."

Gribbin actually approaches most projects with the help of a home improvement instruction book.

"I will ask someone at the hardware store for help, too. People are always willing to help you," said Gribbin.

Yet Gribbin doesn't always seek step-by-step instructions. With the help of Ron Novak of Cedar Hardware in Cedar, she designed and implemented an improvised box spring for a damaged antique brass bed. "It's a beautiful bed," commented Gribbin, "and I have



Record-Eagle/Meeagan M. Reid

The Barbara K 30 piece do-it-yourself toolkit, on display at Traverse City's Ace Hardware, includes: a 6-in-1 screwdriver, 16 piece hex keys, a 2-in-1 level, a 7-oz. hammer, a 6-in-1 putty knife, a 6 inch adjustable wrench, 6-inch slip joint pliers, a 10 inch measuring tape, assorted hardware (nails, screws, picture hooks, plastic anchors) and an 84 page "how to" booklet.

had the pleasure of sleeping in it."

So what does the novice female do-it-yourselfer need to know to get started?

"I think every woman should have a hammer, a set of screwdrivers, a set of pliers, and maybe a staple gun too," said Kathy.

Power tools are included in Gribbin's collection. Salisbury noted, "There are a lot of light duty power tools that women often choose."

"Women need to have their own toolbox with real tools. And don't be afraid to buy gadgets, like an electrical tester, because they work and keep you safe," said Gribbin. "It's really important to follow all of the precautions for working with substances, because some of that stuff is really toxic."

Laying tile in the bathroom is Gribbin's plan for her next project.

From classes to female-friendly tools to the helpful hardware store employee, there are a variety of ways for a woman to get the job done.

Kristen Counts is a local freelance writer.

Tips on hiring a contractor

On the route to home renovations, hiring a contractor is bound to end up on the to-do list. Follow these simple steps to ensure the job is done right:

- Ask friends, neighbors and co-workers for contractor referrals.
- Contact local trade organizations, such as the local Builder Association or Remodelers Council, for the names of reputable contractors in your area.
- Check out the contractor with your local or state consumer protection officials.
- Ask the contractor for customer references who have projects similar to yours.
- Ask for a copy of the contractor's current insurance certificates and licenses, if required.
- Get written estimates from several firms. Make sure the bids are based on identical project specifications.
- Get all guarantees, warranties and promises in writing.
- Agree on start dates and completion dates — and have them written into the contract.

Source: Federal Trade Commission, www.ftc.gov

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