

Real Estate

Mason, brick shortage spell double trouble

By SUZIE MARKS

The coal shortage that plagued our neighboring states all winter has deposited its residue on Michigan's building industry.

Across the tri-county area, developed subdivisions with almost completed houses stand unbricked.

"There's been a tremendous shortage of brick since the building boom last year," said a salesman from Kurtz Brick Co. in Livonia.

Most of Michigan's brick is made from clay in Ohio, Indiana and Iowa through a high heat firing process. The fuel stricken states, hindered by production cut backs, are responsible for our dwindling supplies.

"The brick plants are operating at capacity now, but they can't keep up with the demand," Kurtz officials said. Brick is sold in units of 1,000. Builders claim prices increased 20 per cent over last year. Depending on the quality, bricks range from \$140 to \$500 per thousand.

Once a builder can secure a sufficient brick supply, he is burdened with locating a qualified mason to lay it.

Stock piles of brick in front of otherwise completed houses are a familiar sight around southeastern Michigan.

SO WHAT'S happened to all the masons?

"Since the 1974-75 recession, many masons left the business and went to Ford and other companies and didn't come back," said Richard Sewab, president of Great Lakes Homes in Farmington Hills.

Mason shortages are partially responsible for the three-month delays Great Lakes has experienced in delivering their finished house to the consumer.

Sewab's company builds houses in Rochester and sections of Macomb County. A qualified mason may demand 30 per cent more for his labor this year than he did in 1976, he said. A mason averages \$200 per thousand bricks he lays, Sewab said.

"The mason shortages are very serious, we have many houses completely finished on the inside but no brick," said George Torrente, president of Galaxy Homes, a home builder

in Troy, West Bloomfield, Sterling Heights and Avon Township.

The results is the consumer can't move into the home. There's no closing, so we can't pay the contractor. Last year, we had the same problem," Torrente said.

The average home in West Bloomfield, for example, requires 30,000 to 35,000 bricks, and masonry crews dictate the time spent on each job.

"No two crews are alike. The man hours depend on the individuals themselves. A crew of three brothers, who split the profits, may lay 3,000 in one day.

"A mason being paid by the hour may only lay 700 in a day," Torrente said.

EMPLOYERS UNWILLINGNESS to hire mason apprentices is another cause for the masonry shortage, said Louis Scheich of the Mason Contractors Association.

The association has 51 apprentices, but the contractors don't want to bother training them, he claimed. There are 1,000 journeymen masons in the tri-county area.

Three weeks of practical training and three-years of on-the-job training plus two weeks of night school in the winter comprise the apprenticeship program.

If they get jobs, the men are paid \$8.52 per hour including benefits for the first six months then a five per cent increase every six months. At the end of three years, they earn \$11.96 per hour.

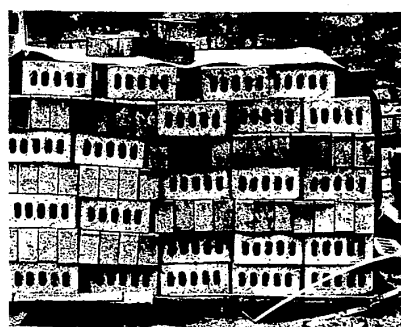
As journeymen, they start at a base wage of \$11.56 plus fringe benefits.

Mother Nature has bitten many hands this season contributing to the building slow down. Local building codes require temperatures to be above freezing and the sky to be sunny in order for the masons to work, due to the calcium chloride in the mortar mix.

When the temperature dips below freezing, as it did most of this winter, the mortar mix doesn't harden adequately and eventually crumbles.

The house cost burden runs the gamut of passes for a panorama of reasons. Like everything else, the buck stops with the consumer.

"Absolutely, the consumer has to expect to pay more with all these problems," Sewab said.



While there appears to be more than enough houses to go around, there's shortage of masons and bricks to complete the job. The coal strike, plus several other contributing factors, have created a shortage of that precious commodity that walls us in. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

Cedar siding becomes popular

Trends and energy efficiency appear to be paving the way to brickless homes.

"We've almost eliminated the use of brick on our houses," said Toby Holtzman, partner of Holtzman & Silverman builders in Southfield.

Originally, the Midwest was the home of brick homes, the builder adds, but rising costs and the unavailability of bricks and masons has opened doors for building with other materials.

Cedar shakes and aluminum siding have replaced the traditional brick exteriors.

"It's faster to build without brick. We can put siding on in one day, we can't do that with brick," Holtzman said.

Wood covers are more energy efficient than brick siding, the builder said, because bricks conduct cold and wood doesn't—this saves the homeowner money in heating bills.

A brickless development on the outskirts of Ann Arbor is a new Holtzman and Silverman project. The houses, ranging from \$60,000-\$90,000, are encased with cedar shakes in the Cape Cod design.

"This is a trend (brickless homes), and we don't stop it. We knew a long time ago this trend was on the way, and we're quite satisfied with it," Holtzman said.

ONLY THE FIREPLACE is brick in a Pulte house, said Michael Moore, vice-president and construction manager of the company.

The \$50,000-\$80,000 houses in West Bloomfield, Troy, Rochester, Farmington, Chesterfield and Canton townships have aluminum exteriors, with a few models having partial brick fronts.

Housing trends begin in California, said Abbey advertising director Michele Burkli. "California has been using cedar shakes for quite a few years, and we picked up the idea for our contemporary homes."

A two-story front foyer with bubble windows are innovations in housing. Abbey Homes offers green-house windows over the kitchen sinks and a planter in the two-story foyer that can be watered from a faucet in a nearby closet.

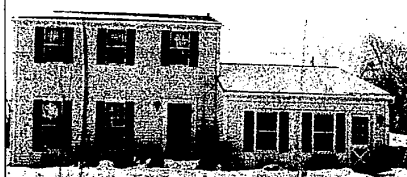
"Our homes have wood siding because wood is more heat efficient than aluminum," Burkli said. "Skylights are a feature, but fireplaces and wetters are a must."

Abbey custom houses in West Bloomfield and Bloomfield Hills are priced from \$170,000 to \$600,000 for one-acre to 1½-acre prime lots.



The trend is changing all around the country as more builders are constructing wooden, cedar shake and aluminum sided houses.

Home Showcase



This colonial model in the Longwood development in Farmington Hills starts at about \$58,000.

6 models open in Plymouth

The Curtis Building Co., Dean Oulim, Inc., and Biltmore Homes have opened the new Trailwood Three subdivision in Plymouth Township.

Six new models are ready for showing—four colonials, one quad and one ranch with prices starting at \$79,990.

All of the colonials have a den in addition to a family room and first-floor laundry.

There are 186 sites—about two-

thirds of which are already sold and occupied.

To enter the subdivision, interested buyers should take Tenneyson Drive, one block west of Canton Center north of Ann Arbor Road. The project is in the Plymouth School District.

Low Harding is handling the sales and is project manager. Model hours are noon to 8 p.m. daily and Sunday; noon to 6 p.m. Saturday. For more details, call Harding at 459-2830.

Close to Twelve Oaks Mall

Dave Pink Builder, Inc., offers three new models in the Novi Whispering Meadows subdivision located minutes away from the Twelve Oaks Shopping Center.

Sixty sites are available, each about 80 by 120 feet. Larger and treed lots are available, with some backing a park, with premiums from \$500 to \$2,000. Some of the sites back an apple orchard.

The Montclair ranch is a three bedroom, 1½ bath house with a first-floor laundry.

The Princeton is a four-bedroom, 1½ bath colonial but an alternative plan is shown with three bedrooms and 2½ baths.

The Yorktown offers three bedrooms, 2½ baths with den in addition to a paneled family room with fireplace in its bi-level format.

The homes, all with two-car garages and family rooms, start at \$83,990. Pink Builder is a NOW participant (Home Owners Warranty) with a 10-year insured warranty.

The project is in Novi near Haggerty and Ten Mile roads. The houses are open daily 1-8 p.m. and Sunday, Saturday 1-6 p.m.

For more information, call project sales manager Pat Shaner at 478-3543.

A ranch or colonial choice

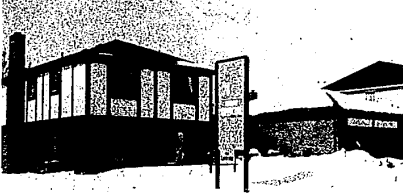
Vista Construction Corp. has opened two new model houses in its Longwood project in Farmington Hills.

Lot sizes are 60 by 135 feet with large treed lots available at \$400-\$2,000 premiums.

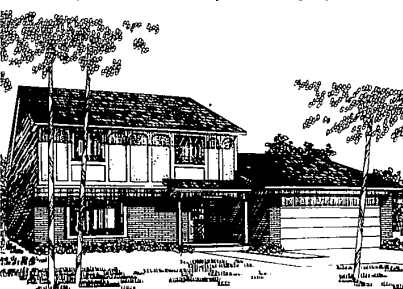
The models are fully developed with underground utilities and are within walking distance of downtown Farmington. They're south on Nine Mile just west of Farmington Road.

The builder offers one ranch and one colonial starting at \$34,900 and \$57,990 respectively. All new models offer basements and two-car, attached garages. They also include insulated windows and screens with 3½-inch insulation packages.

The models are open daily 1-8 p.m. and Sunday, Saturday hours are 1-6 p.m. and are closed Thursday. Sales for Vista Construction is handled by Art Savoie. His number is 325-0555.



All the models in the Trailwood project in Plymouth Township offer a den, family room, first floor laundry and two-car garages.



Novi's Whispering Meadows models come in three choices: Ranch, colonial and bi-level.

Scholtz plans 2 projects

Two new large developments of houses are planned for Oakland County by Scholtz Homes. The houses will be in the \$45,000-\$60,000 range, said Bill Sarti, southeastern Michigan representative of the company.

Scholtz is a house package firm that produces more than 800 single-family units per year at its 106,000-square-foot facility in Toledo.

In the past, Scholtz Homes had more appeal to builders of fewer than 20 houses per year because it

spreads the cost of design and engineering over a large number of units and provides expertise the smaller builder could not afford.

House and Garden selected the firm's Greenfield model (from \$130,000) as the magazine's house of the year. Out of 187 entrants in a recent Chicago Home architectural contest, the Williamsburg model was awarded the gold key for the best designed house.

For more on Scholtz, call Sarti at 646-5626 during business hours.

Checklist provides aid on moving day

Here are some valuable moving tips from the South Oakland County Board of Realtors.

Moving day need not be a family nightmare if you follow these moving tips and plan the day's activities well in advance.

• Map out a timetable of all things that must be done before moving day. A day-by-day calendar is a convenient way to keep track of all the details.

• Make a list of all magazines, periodicals, book clubs, charge cards, delivery services and others which you will need to cancel or provide a change of address. Check with your post office for a change of address kit. While there, make arrangements to have mail forwarded to your new address.

• Begin using up food you have on hand and buy only what you will need. Frozen foods are difficult to transport.

• Before you begin packing, empty or close completely. Use it to store items such as cleaning equipment and suitcases that will be needed on moving day. Be sure to place a sign on the door so that movers or helpful friends don't empty the closet by mistake.

• Equip the family picnic basket as a portable kitchen with disposable

utensils, a bottle opener, snacks, coffee pot, hand towels, can opener and other useful items that might be needed after the kitchen is packed for the move.

• If you're doing the packing, be certain to mark the contents of each box on several sides of the carton. Also note the room in your new home where it should be placed. Labeling boxes properly not only will save time when unpacking, but also can eliminate shuffling of boxes from room to room in your new home.

• If you're moving within the same city, send drapes and rugs to be cleaned just before moving. You often can have them delivered to your new home, avoiding the hassle of moving them yourself. Many cleaners will even wrap the rugs for more convenient moving. Be certain to mark wrappings with dimensions and the room in which the rug should be placed in your new home.

• If you're making a long distance move, you may want to wait and have drapes and rugs cleaned at your new location. Although carefully packed, these items can be soiled or creased during transit, resulting in a need to repeat the costly cleaning.

'How much do we spend when buying a house?'

"How much house can I afford?" That's probably the most often asked question by a person venturing into the real estate market today.

Well, to help answer that question, a title insurance company has prepared a booklet to help make home buying easier.

The booklet, which is available from your local board of realtors, takes into account a variety of down payments, range of income and interest rates.

At one time, it was believed that a new home buyer could afford to buy a home equal to two to 2½ times the family income.

That meant a family with a \$15,000 yearly income could afford to buy a home priced between \$30,000 and \$37,500.

But the South Oakland County Board of Realtors advises that this axiom only serves as a guide and does not consider individual circumstances.

Factors such as down payments and monthly home payments (including principal, interest, taxes and insurance) are variables.

The booklet's tables provide answers to home prices and buying power based on 30-year loan with 20 per cent down, common loan terms in many sections of the nation.

At a 9.5 per cent interest rate, for example, a family with a \$15,000 income should be able to handle monthly payments of \$310, according to the table, and afford a home rang-

ing in price from \$33,000-\$6,000. A down payment of \$8,800 would be required.

At lower interest rates, the same family should be able to afford a slightly more expensive home.

The board of realtors says that by increasing the down payment, more expensive homes become affordable.

But many mortgages don't require such a high down payment on the house. There are many mortgages available with only a five per cent down payment.

But first check out all sources, local realtors, banks, mortgage companies or savings and loan associations for details on their mortgage terms, before making any decision on down payments and interest rates.

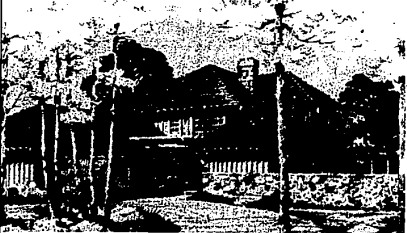
Interested?

If you are a builder, sales manager, real estate agent, banker or anyone else connected with real estate and want us to relay information to our readers, feel free to contact us.

Direct your calls to Ron Garbinski at our Birmingham office. His number is 644-1100, ext. 257.

The office address is 1225 Bowers, Birmingham 48012.

The real estate page will appear regularly every other Thursday in all 12 Observer & Eccentric newspapers.



This is the type of new home Scholtz builders will soon develop somewhere in Oakland County. Prices range from \$45,000 to \$300,000.