

High fuel costs spark boom in super fireplaces

By NANCY AUSTIN

A sign over the fireplace at the Wooden Heat Stove Works in Plymouth says: "Your fireplace creates a heat loss of 1,500 BTUs per hour. Determined by the American Heating Institute."

But the sign was on an ordinary fireplace. It was one which had been converted into a money saver by the Free Heat Machine.

The machine cycles heat into the room using a tubular grate, blower and special metal construction. By inserting the special unit into an already existing masonry fireplace, the fire's heat can go to work for you, significantly reducing your heating bills in cold weather. In short, the heat is blown into your room and doesn't escape up the chimney.

MARY POOLE, owner of the Wooden Heat Stove Works on Starkweather in Old Village can, was born on a farm. She found it natural to want to help people learn to "do it themselves."

Mrs. Poole "ate and breathed wood stoves," she opened her shop in December 1977. Two months later, the store held its first "free heat demonstration," and Mrs. Poole was astounded at the number of people who came to find out about alternate heat sources.

"People who came into the shop were looking then. Now they are buying. Many people wait to buy because it is a totally new concept," she said.

"They remember grandma heating her house with a wood stove, but that's all."

SOME PEOPLE from out-of-state or special metal construction. By inserting the special unit into an already existing masonry fireplace, the fire's heat can go to work for you, significantly reducing your heating bills in cold weather.

Pat O'Brien, a manufacturers representative for supplemental heating systems, says, "This is not a new concept. It has been used for over 50 years. But it is in the last three years that fireplace conversion has become popular."

"Two years ago, manufacturers could not build enough units fast enough to satisfy the national demand," he explained.

Michigan is a prime market for fireplace conversions, O'Brien said, because of the high cost of heating.

cause fireplaces are really a popular item here. "Chances are when you have company, one of the first things you will do is light a fire," he said.

Conceivably, they say, a supplemental unit can pay for itself in four years, not counting the cost of the wood. This is based on a 2200 square foot, two-story home, with four occupants, paying approximately \$130 per month in heating bills.

One such customer is Bill Saddler who came from Dexter to get advice on a supplemental system.

"I tried a couple of gimmicks of my own. But I am concerned about smoke getting into the house. Also I am currently using air from the inside of my house. I am trying to find a method of saving the heated air already inside."

Saddler, who has electric heat, pays \$230 per month to heat his 2,300 sq. ft. home. "Everyone in our subdivision is concerned about the cost of heat going up. Even though we couldn't use a supplemental unit during the day, because my wife and I both work, we would heat the house with it at night. Right now my wife uses one of those snug sacks while watching TV."

MELVIN DODES of Canton agrees: "Heating bills are a concern of everyone. Right now I am paying \$80 to \$90 per month. And the price will be higher. It looks like the price of some of these units is high, but it all depends on how much good it does."

"We use our fireplace two to three times a week, plus weekends," he said. It adds extra heat on the ground floor.

I'd like to get more efficient use of it." "When a customer comes into my shop, I try to be realistic with them. I don't high pressure them," Mrs. Poole says. "I know they have to think about it. People have to be innovative and they have to be unique. There are so many custom homes in this area that there is no standard hook up."

"There are not only fireplace conversion units, but there are furnace add-ons," she explained. "We ask them if they want a 24-hour burn, how large is

their home, do they want a unit which is thermostatically controlled? There are a lot of things to consider. We try to help a customer find a solution which best for his home."

The Pooles, who live in Plymouth, have been heating their own home with a carousel unit for six years. A carousel unit is a round, glass, free-standing unit. They have now decided to use a furnace add-on unit.

"We keep the carousel burning constantly," said Mrs. Poole. "It has

saved us a lot of money, so we decided to go one step further," she said.

The 1,200 sq. ft. shop is also heated with a supplemental heating system. Next to the fireplace sits a log boom, from which Mrs. Poole removed several logs and added them to the gently burning fire.

Glancing around the room housing some 50 different types of stoves, Mrs. Poole says, "There is no limit to what a person can do if he just uses a little imagination."

Bridge repairs contracted

will cost \$18,300 and is expected to be completed in June.

In other contracts awarded by the Michigan Department of Transportation, the C.A. Hull Co. of Walled Lake was a winner. The Walled Lake firm will build a \$4.3 million bridge in Lansing. The bridge will carry Logan Street over the Grand River.

A bridge carrying Drake Road over Eight Mile Road in Farmington Hills will get some repairs in the months to come.

Staco, Inc., an Oxford construction company, was the lowest of two bidders.

The project, which will consist of under-deck repairs and new grouting,

Channel 56 board now open for view

The first WTWS-TV, channel 56, Board of Directors meeting open to the public will be Thursday at The St. Regis Hotel, 3071 W. Grand Blvd., 1 p.m. Detroit.

Those who wish to speak at the meeting should call the Channel 56 general manager's office, 873-7200, ext. 101, to

arrange for time on the agenda.

The station said the "open meetings" provision of the 1978 Telecommunications Finance Act, which calls for open board meeting sessions, allows the board to consider certain confidential or proprietary matters in closed session.

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