

Suburban Life

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Kitchen switchin': Doors open for do-it-yourselfers

By Richard Lech
staff writer

Have your kitchen cabinets been painted so many times it would take an archeologist to determine the original color?

Are the cabinets so small the shelves are hunched back from overstacking?

In other words, do you think it's time to remodel your kitchen?

— If so, do you dare do it yourself?

Representatives of Kurtis Kitchen and Bath Center in Livonia would say yes. They've made a thriving business out of catering to the do-it-yourselfer.

"THE MAJORITY of people are afraid to install their own cabinets," Kurtis co-owner Len Nakisher of West Bloomfield said. "We teach them how to do it; show them how simple it is. And the savings is great."

"A lot of people aren't aware the project can be as easy as it really is," Kurtis general manager Bruce Levine of Southfield said.

Often, all it takes is the ability to use a tape measure, drill and a screwdriver, plus the willingness to spend from one to three days working on the job, Levine said.

"Most people have done projects around the house that are more time consuming. Changing a faucet really is the most difficult part of it."

MORE AND MORE people are going the do-it-yourself route, Levine said. That has been reflected in the company's rapid growth in past few years during the height of Detroit's recession, he said.

Kurtis expanded six months ago to the Livonia site, 12500 Merriman. The Livonia building is both a store and the central warehouse for the chain. "The chain has five other stores in the Detroit area, including one in Farmington Hills."

The store is designed to provide one-stop shopping, everything for the kitchen and bathroom but the floors and ceilings, Levine said.

The company advertises itself as the largest bathroom and kitchen store in the state.

"WE ADVERTISE that we're Michigan's largest. And the Better Business Bureau and (State Attorney General) Frank Kelley watch that kind of thing pretty close."

The company sells to home builders, but 70 percent of its sales are to homeowners wishing to do their own remodeling work, Nakisher said.

The Kurtis staff will guide the homeowner every step of the way through the remodeling process, although Kurtis will not do the installation work itself, Nakisher said.

Customers provide Kurtis with measurements of their kitchen or bathroom, and the company provides them with the cabinets.

"All of our people are qualified kitchen designers. We will design the kitchen for them," Nakisher said. "If they are a little afraid of their measurements we'll even come out to the house and double check them."

IF THE customer has an odd space to fill, Kurtis's carpenters can increase or decrease the cabinet or countertop to fit the space.

"A lot of older buildings have weird dimensions," Levine said. "Twenty or 30 years ago, nothing was standard."

"We can't totally revamp a thing, but there are a lot of little tricks we can do to aid them in oddball situations."

Once the homeowner takes the cabinets home, it's just a matter of removing the cabinets from their boxes and screwing them onto the walls, Levine said.

MORE COMPLICATED jobs might require spending \$100 for an electrician or plumber, but still the savings are there, Levine said.

The average cost of modernizing a kitchen and putting in cabinets through a home improvement company is \$3,000 to 10,000, Nakisher said. The cost to do it yourself is \$1,500, he said.

Homeowners also can save money by resurfacing cabinets or sinks themselves.

They're saving \$1,000 on labor, which many are putting into higher quality of cabinets," Levine said.

If person doesn't want to do the installation work himself or can't because of a physical impairment, the company will recommend installers who can do the job.

THE NEW Livonia plant, which Kurtis spent four months converting from an old warehouse, has plenty of stock on hand for remodeling work, Nakisher said.

The building is 690-feet long — longer than two football fields — and contains \$750,000 worth of inventory, Nakisher said. The building's stock recently included 8,000 kitchen cabinets and almost 4,000 bathroom vanities, he said.

Because the company buys its merchandise direct and in great volume, it can sell for less, Nakisher said.

"Our theme is wholesale to all," he said.

The building also has workshop areas in which refinishing and custom work are done. Besides selling goods from major manufacturers, Kurtis also manufactures its own office furniture, countertops, laminated furniture, bed sets, credenzas and wall units, all out of Formica.

ALTHOUGH most bathroom remodeling doesn't include the bathtub, the company still sells a surprising number of bathtubs, Levine said. Big sellers are Fiberglass and PVC tubs with walls that eliminate the need for bathroom tile.

Nakisher owns the store with Lou Kurtis and his sons Howard and Marty Kurtis. The elder Kurtis started the store 16 years ago in Warren strictly as a wholesale distributorship.

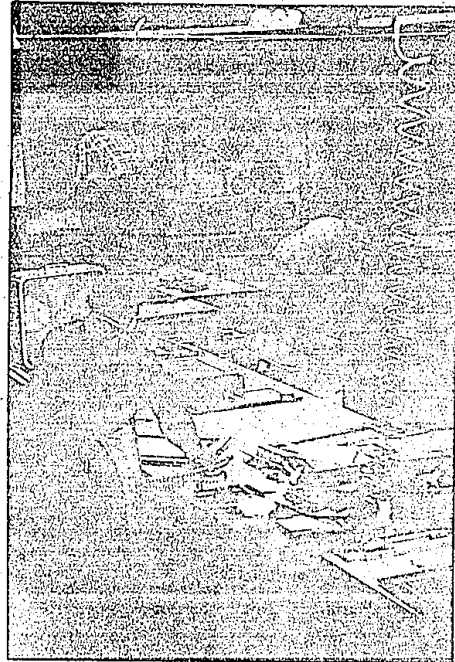
Two years later, Nakisher, who was trained as a horticulturist, sold a retailing garden center he had been running. Kurtis asked him to join his company.

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Kurtis Kitchen and Bath Center



Len Nakisher, one of the owners of Kurtis Kitchen and Bath Center, has made a thriving business out of catering to the do-it-yourself home remodeler.



Craftsmen at Kurtis Kitchen and Bath Center's Livonia store and warehouse can customize cabinets to fit unusual size rooms.

Staff photos
by Art Emanuel

'The Kids on The Block' meet Tri-county Braille Volunteers

Nardin Park Braille Transcribers posted the annual meeting of Tri-County Braille Volunteers this spring when they introduced the brailleists to "The Kids on The Block."

The near-life-size puppets who make up The Kids on The Block have been around since the mainstreaming movement began, easing the transition of handicapped children into regular classrooms by familiarizing the students with some of the special problems of the handicapped.

"The Kids on The Block have been in most of the schools in Oakland County and even most of the schools in Farmington school district, so our students know who they are. But if you are of an age that doesn't keep you in touch with school children, it is unlikely that you've ever seen them," said Fran Hoetger, president of the host group.

Donna Nowland and Kathy Kinsley, teacher consultants for Oakland County Schools, program a couple of Kids on The Block shows into their regular work-week, generally in response to teachers who will be receiving a child

with a special problem into their class.

"One of the keys to making this work is that the children are invited, even encouraged, to interrupt our skits at any time with a question," Nowland said. "The skits, which come with the purchase of the puppet, are written explicitly to spur questions."

BARBARA AIELLO, a former special-education teacher in Washington, D.C., created her first puppet show in 1977 to combat the fears and apprehensions youngsters have in approaching the handicapped. She's retired from teaching now and in the manufacturing process of furnishing a choice of 33 different puppets to school districts in every state and eight other countries.

Oakland County owns six puppets, some handicapped, some non-handicapped.

"We chose the puppets, all of whom have names, ages, histories, with the handicapped our children were most likely to come into contact with most likely to have the most questions about," Kinsley said.

"Some of the newer puppets for sale are overweight; are adopted; have diabetes. Those are valid problems for kids, but we are concerned with the new child in the class who must wear a helmet, or is in a wheelchair, or is blind," she said.

All of the skits are written for the non-handicapped puppet to ask the blind questions, children ask, or might want to ask, of the handicapped puppet in a one-to-one dialogue.

The skits do their job well, as there is no dearth of audience participation.

"The whole idea behind this is that it is much easier to talk to a doll with what might be an awkward question, than with a real person," Nowland said.

Simultaneously the puppeteers must not only be keenly alert, but well-versed in order to be able to answer all questions on all handicaps.

When the women were asked if they had ever received a question that stopped them, Kinsley said there was a time when she certainly had been taken back.

One child asked, "Would it be easier to be blind or deaf?"

THE TRI-COUNTY Braille Volunteers is made up of brailleists who are affiliates of the sisterhoods of Congregation Beth Shalom, Temple Emanuel, Congregation Shaarey Zedek, Temple Beth-El, Congregation Adat Shalom, Congregation Beth Achim and Temple Israel, the Grosse Pointe Braille Club and Nardin Park Braille Transcribers.

In the area of education, the members furnish Braille textbooks, instruction manuals and specialty subjects, such as math, music or foreign language, tests, research materials and tactile graphics.

In the area of careers they have furnished programs and agendas, handbooks and manuals and professional papers.

For personal needs they have brailled everything from greeting cards to cookbooks; craft patterns to address books.

The requests for services are filled for schools, libraries, community agencies and individuals.

Center's summer term of offerings listed

More than 80 classes, workshops and special events are available at the Farmington Community Center for the summer session beginning the first week of June and running through mid August.

In-person registration at the center, 34705 Farmington Road, will be 6-8 p.m. Tuesday, June 5. Mail and in-person registration will be accepted on June 6 and continue until class maximums are reached.

Registrants will find a wide range of subjects to fill leisure summer hours while developing new interests and skills.

Artists of varying media will find landscape workshops taught by Marge Chellistoy, landscape in oil by Jerrine Habsburg, and a watercolor class

taught by Linda Berke, a new instructor to the staff. Karen Layle will return to teach art techniques to teachers, parents, scout leaders and librarians.

Monie Nagler, just returned from photographing the Upper Peninsula, will conduct a four-session beginners class and a dark-room class for camera enthusiasts.

The center's popular cooks, Judy Antishin and Barb Dermody, have whipped up new recipes. Dermody will return with her Garden Gourmet class and Antishin invites all to join her for a patio dinner. A new 16-17 class has been added by Antishin. Another 16-17 class, low-calorie microwave, will be taught by Vince McCallum in addition to his regular microwave class.

THE CENTER staff adds new workshops to the line-up on such subjects as adoptive parenting, consumer issues during pregnancy and birth, career transition, resume writing, center control, manuscript work and estate planning.

Summer classes emphasize exercise, leisure and self-improvement.

For improved posture, body control and a relaxed frame of mind the center offers tai-chi and yoga. Outdoor enthusiasts may register for golf and riding lessons. Tom Vandeveldt will teach woodturning; students will complete a stylized stick. WomanTime management is a new class designed for women and taught by Beth Weber.

Other new classes include bobbin lace taught by Caroline Cuffield who

studied and taught in Belgium. For the cable-television, advocates, Hank Samouelian will teach two classes of script writing. "Basket lovers may want to join Jan Bagley for her basketball class."

The center's summer roster also includes classes and workshops for young people.

New this year are sessions for mom and tot to make a pot and a preschool nature walk and art class.

Karen Layle is available for two weeks in June to teach children art wire sculpture, tie dye, and Gail Yarsak returns to teach soft sculpture to school-age children.

"A Night under the Stars" is set with Martina Schaeffer, a Cranbrook Institute astronomer, who will conduct a "tour" of the summer sky in July.

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