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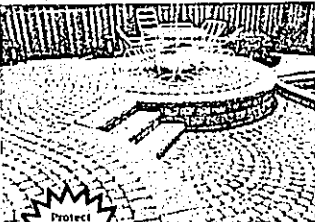
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'Tune up' your kitchen

By Janice Tiger-Kramer
special writer

IF YOU'D like to update the kitchen without taking out a home improvement loan, a new service called Kitchen Tune-Up may be the answer.

The tune-up is a nine-step process that helps restore wood cabinets and moldings to almost new shape without stripping or sanding. Remember, you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear, but Kitchen Tune-Up will enhance wood cabinets and, at the same time, extend the life of the kitchen.

How does it work? First, all hardware is removed and a patented product is sprayed and rubbed into the wood to remove dirt caused by smoke, hand oils and cooking grease.

Nicks and scratches are touched up with stain, and bumper pads are installed on doors and drawers to protect the wood. Next, hinges are adjusted, drawer slides are lubricated and all surfaces are polished with a patented oil. Finally, the counter is cleaned, hardware is replaced and the wood is buffed.

A TYPICAL kitchen (about 21-26 running feet of cabinets) takes one serviceman about five hours to finish. Most kitchen jobs cost under \$300, which can include the installation of new hardware also sold by the company. Cabinets don't have to be emptied to have the work done and the kitchen can be used right after the job is finished.

Betty Stomp of Southfield looked at her 35-year-old kitchen last fall and decided it was time for the cabinets to be stripped or replaced.

"That idea went over like a lead balloon," she said, laughing. "My husband and I decided to tune up the kitchen instead and the difference was amazing. Of course, you can't make old things look brand new, but when the nicks were filled and the wood was polished, the difference was like night and day."

Jack and Karen Balderas started the Detroit-area franchise about a year-and-a-half ago in Bloomfield Hills. Jack does the work himself and says he's always amazed at the difference when a job is finished.

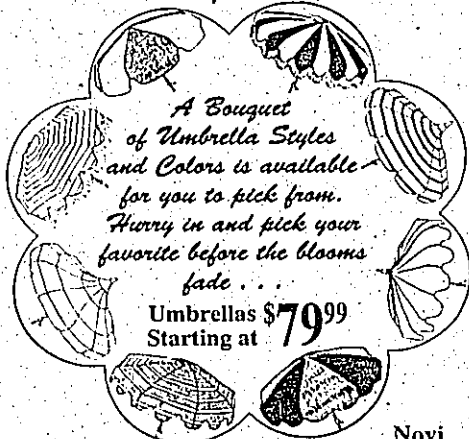
"The process really fills a gap between keeping the kitchen you have and replacing it completely," he said. "If you leave dirt in carpeting, it will wear prematurely. The same is true of wood cabinets."

THOUGH THE company believes kitchens should be tuned up after 10-15 years of use, most people seem to wait until cabinets are 20-25 years old, the couple says.

Still, older cabinets can be spruced up and you won't have to have the process repeated for another four or five years. In between, the customer can use a water-based product to clean cabinets that the company sells for under \$10.

For more information, call Kitchen Tune-Up at 1-800-821-0883.

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