

# Do-it-yourself buffs push consumer rights

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

There's a gladiator in the area — a consumer gladiator.

Many years ago, Joe Gagnon, now president of the Garden City Chamber of Commerce, received that name from a Detroit daily newspaper.

The name stuck.

Since then, Gagnon has worked overtime trying to educate the public. He's a consultant to Detroit's consumer affairs director and hosts a radio talk show "The Appliance and Consumer Doctor" (WCAR-AM, 1090, Garden City; and WAAM-AM (1600), Ann Arbor).

Gagnon has assisted many consumers in small claims court cases. He prefers to teach people how to fix their own appliances.

Gagnon gives the following tips:

- Ask lots of questions before you deal with a business. If you're not satisfied with the responses or the attitude of the salesperson, don't conduct business there.
- Make inquiries with the local chamber of commerce, the Better Business Bureau and the Attorney General's office. Ask the business for references.
- Ask family and friends which companies they have used. Word of mouth advertising is still the best method of expanding a business.
- Don't use telephone book advertising as a bible on ethics.
- Some ads placed in newspapers are "come-on" ads with low-ball pricing designed to bring you in. Use care when dealing with advertised prices because the cheapest price is not always the best buy.

Gagnon, president of Carmack Appliance & Service Co. in Garden City, estimates that consumers have a 1-in-3 chance of being

cheated on appliance repairs.

He's finishing a 300-400-page book he expects to be in bookstores by Christmas. The book, expected to be published by Master Handyman Press in Royal Oak, will focus on the appliance industry in general. Topics include dealer structure, advertising methods, telephone book advertising, product failures unknown to the world, and product maintenance and repair.

"It's a book that Ralph Nader should have written," Gagnon said.

Gagnon's not the only author on the do-it-yourself book scene. For nine years, Glenn Haegge has hosted "Ask the Handyman" on WXYT-AM (1270), Southfield, 8 a.m. to noon Saturday and Sunday.

If you have a do-it-yourself question, Haegge's got the answer. His 166-page book, "Fix it Fast & Easy," is a treasure trove of answers.

Haegge also includes a tip from Gagnon in his book: Tip No. 108 — "What's the Best Way to Clear the Drain Hole in the Back of my Frost-Free Refrigerator?"

Haegge's book is constructed to further aid the do-it-yourselfer.

"The binding is a special 'Lay-Flat' binding called Otobind," Haegge said. "The technology is newly imported from Europe. This special binding makes it so that the book will never close on you in the middle of a project. Just press down and the book will stay open."

"The pages are extra thick so you won't tear them in the middle of a job. The type is big so that if it's a hot day and your glasses keep falling off, most of you will still be able to follow the directions. The tips have been laid out so that you almost never have to turn a page in the middle of a tip once you start a project."



'Consumer Gladiator': Joe Gagnon, a consumer protection advocate, hosts "The Appliance and Consumer Doctor" on McLean Hunter cablevision in Garden City.



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