

## APPLIANCE DOCTOR

## Columnist helps TV uncover a scam



JOE GAGNON

During Friday's 11 p.m. news, the Newshawk reporter Joe Ducey aired a story about appliance repair on WXYZ-TV. That story and my involvement are the subject of today's column with assurance that there is more to happen in the months ahead.

The TV station rented a fully furnished house in Madison Heights and installed several hidden cameras throughout. I was asked to inspect the refrigerator and to create a problem which would need diagnoses from a qualified service technician. Much to my amazement and the camera which was watching my every move, I didn't have to create a problem, because there already was one occurring with the refrigerator.

This 20-year-old top mount refrigerator has a plugged drain and it was obvious that it had been plugged for quite some time. The crisper drawers in the bottom of the refrigerator section had been removed and two large towels

placed on the floor of the refrigerator to absorb the water. This had been happening for so long that the floor paint had been eaten away and plenty of rust was showing. The existing problem with the refrigerator was so obvious that I didn't think a technician would try to deceive a homeowner.

The station's legal people thought it best to just leave it as is and go on with the rest of the story. I also felt sorry for the homeowner, she apparently does not read my column or sent for my free booklet which describes this problem in detail and how to correct it with a turkey baster. My point is we did not have to create a problem with the refrigerator, it already had one of the most common problems which occur with top mount refrigerators.

I then began the process of checking the operation of the product and found the temperatures in both sections to be adequate for good food preservation. I found the compressor to be doing its job even under the strain of a very dirty condenser. It will have to be cleaned before the hot summer temperatures arrive or serious failure will take place.

I removed the back wall inside the freezer and found the evaporator coil to be free of accumulated frost indicating any kind of a defrost problem. The defrost timer, the defrost heater and terminator all functioned properly through more than one defrost cycle. Those in attendance, plus the camera, all agreed that the refrigerator was working properly except for the two obvious problems. I also pointed out that a qualified technician could take care of these problems and be in and out of the house in less than half an hour. I also made mention that because this service call done honestly would not create much income for the service company, the technician might add to the existing problem of a plugged drain by saying that the defrost timer was defective as well. According to the story on television, that is exactly what happened.

A service technician charged this supposed homeowner almost \$200 for replacing the defrost timer. This is a part you can buy for \$33 and install yourself in less than half an hour. If a service call plus a half hour labor equate to \$160 per half hour, that's

\$320 per hour. Give me 10 men who do this 10 times a day and I'll show you a very rich man.

When the service technician was finished with replacing the defrost timer, he took it with him and wouldn't give it back to the supposed homeowner. He said it was an exchange part, which I doubt to be the truth. I don't know anyone who is paying for old defrost timers and if they are I'm losing thousands of dollars. I suspect there might be another reason why a company would want to keep the customer's old parts.

The company sent the old timer back to the customer's house along with a letter from the station. There was nothing wrong with the timer, except that it had a wear factor involved. Was it the same timer returned that was removed from the refrigerator? There must be a way to find out - stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon, the Appliance Doctor, will answer your questions about maintaining and repairing large appliances. Gagnon is president of Carmack Appliances in Garden City and does a weekly radio program on WJR-AM.

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Presented by Carl J. Creep & Mark Aronoff

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A kitchen's countertop material must be both functional and beautiful. This week's column describes the many advantages of laminate materials. If you're remodeling, MODERN KITCHEN & BATH will provide you with quality materials and innovative recommendations. The kitchen is the source of so many pleasures of life at home and should be a functional expression of your lifestyle. This makes Corian the obvious choice. Its colors, feel, and versatility help complement the finest cabinetry and appliances. Visit our showroom at 819 E. Fourth Street, Royal Oak or call us at 810-546-0660 for consultation, service and to receive our FREE Kitchen and Bath Design Newsletter.

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