



Party project: Walt Davison (center), the guest of honor, chats with Jack Baker and Mary Frances McCaleb. The surprise party for Davison had a hardware or construction theme and took place in a hardware store.

HAMMER TIME

RETIREMENT PARTY BUILT ON HARDWARE THEME

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Construction zones aren't unusual—with such sights as flashing orange lights, waving flags that direct traffic, crews in hard hats. But one "construction zone" was truly one of a kind.

This "zone" was contained in a building, and the completed "project" wasn't something like a highway or structure. The flashing orange lights and waving flags were fun guides. The hard hats were party hats. It was all part of a recent retirement party that was distinctive, to say the least.

The party didn't just have a hardware or construction theme in keeping with the guest of honor's passion for building. It took place in an actual hardware and home decor store.

Walt Davison of Northville, who worked in the automotive division at the IBM office in Southfield, was retiring after 30 years and friends and co-workers wanted to show their appreciation.

Guests were hobnobbing among the door-knobs, showering the honoree with good wishes among the showerheads, partaking of "fixin's" among the fixtures.

"It has been so much fun," said Lucy Oakleaf of Farmington Hills, who worked for the guest of honor.

"He's a really special guy."

"It's awesome," Mary Frances McCaleb, another employee, said of the party. "He deserves it."

Early phase

Oakleaf, client director-DaimlerChrysler AG, IBM Corp., contacted Carolyn Hefner of The China Closet to help plan the retirement party. The China Closet is designed to plan and coordinate special events. Hefner, a Beverly Hills resident, started the business in 1991 with a friend and is now sole owner and operator.

Oakleaf had thought of having the party in a restaurant or a venue for a caterer. Hefner asked Oakleaf about her boss, and Oakleaf related how much Davison liked building. He had even built his retirement home, including constructing the cabinets, pouring the foundations and shingling the roof.

"It was obvious to me where his retirement party should be—in a place he felt totally comfortable and found interesting—a hardware store," Hefner said.

Is that possible? Oakleaf wondered. Hefner asked around at a few stores, and then approached the owners of Herald Wholesale Inc., 20830 Coolidge Highway in Oak Park.

"I loved it," Jerry Katz, owner of the business, said of the idea. "I love parties."

The event marked the first time in 37 years that Herald Wholesale was open on a Saturday night, he said.

It turned out that Davison had bought a lot of the furnishings for his retirement home from the store.

The event took three months to put together. The day was changed from a Friday to a Saturday so more people could come.

Since it was a surprise party, planners were busy just trying to keep Davison in town for the date, which

was last month, without giving it away.

"We had to go through incredible gyrations to keep him here," Oakleaf said.

Party planning

The invitations were printed on actual size blueprints that were then rolled up, secured with a strip of the yellow and black plastic tape used to mark construction sites, and mailed in 24-by-2-1/2-inch mailing tubes.

The invitations read "Shhh! Surprise Construction Project for Walt Davison." They said that "Project Dress" included plumbers, painters, electricians and carpenters, and that instead of gifts, contributions could be made to Habitat for Humanity, a charity in which Davison was active.

The date was given as "Project Start," the time as "Project Span" and the place as "Project Site."

Tiffany Florist of Birmingham fashioned centerpieces by arranging flowers in drainpipes, fuse boxes and other hardware. Accents included paint rollers.

The food, catered by Epoch Events of Novi, was placed at stations around the store. A flashing construction light was near each station to help guide people through the store aisles and displays.

Sinks and countertops held platters of vegetables and bowls of salad. A granite tub on a pedestal was filled with crushed ice for cold salmon. Other seafood was arrayed by the showers. Carving areas were set up for turkey and beef.

The Dennis Tini Quartet performed in the middle of the sales counter. The bar was at another counter. Party favors (squeezers) were in a tub.

About 75 guests attended from all over the country, including Atlanta, Chicago and Boston. They wore such attire as overalls, jeans and caps. Hard hats donated by Jack Baker of Blue Hill Development of Ann Arbor were distributed.

The completed project

To make sure Davison didn't miss his own party, a friend had invited Davison to dinner at a "new restaurant" in Royal Oak. On the way, the friend asked if they could stop at Herald



'Fixin's' and fixtures: Food stations around the store included finger foods among the plumbing fixture display. Epoch Events of Novi catered the party.

Wholesale to pick up something.

Still unsuspecting, Davison walked into the store with the friend. There he was greeted with the musicians playing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow* and applause and cheers from the guests.

"It was pretty wild. It was a gas," Davison said later.

"It was pretty amazing. There was a broad range of people there—college friends, Mom."

He was presented with a special construction apron, and a shovel in honor of the groundbreaking at his retirement house. (His last day on the job was last Thursday.)

The project was a joyous success. The honoree, guests and planners had a good time.

"Carolyn is very gifted and committed to her work and it shows by the little details that made the evening so special," Oakleaf said.

"It was just such a wonderful spirit," Hefner said.



Building on a theme: The party in Herald Wholesale in Oak Park featured such centerpieces by Tiffany Florist of Birmingham as an arrangement in an outlet box, accented with an outlet. A cheese plate was placed on a corner sink. The event was planned by Carolyn Hefner of The China Closet.

MARTY FIGLEY

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See Gardening, Page 3

DR. BRAD DAVIS

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HomeTown Life, Page 7