

Mason, brick shortage spell double trouble

By SUZIE MARKS

The coal shortage that plagued our neighboring states all winter has deposited its residue on Michigan's building industry.

Across the tri-county area, developed subdivisions with almost completed houses stand unbricked.

"There's been a tremendous shortage of brick since the building boom last year," said a salesman from Kurtz Brick Co. in Livonia.

Most of Michigan's brick is made from clay in Ohio, Indiana and Iowa through a high heat firing process. The fuel stricken states, hindered by production cut backs, are operating at our dwindling supplies.

"The brick's plants are responsible for capacity now, but they can't keep up with the demand," Kurtz officials said. Brick is sold in units of 1,000. Builders claim prices increased 20 percent over last year. Depending on the quality, bricks range from \$140 to \$300 per thousand.

Once a builder can secure a sufficient brick supply, he is burdened with locating a qualified mason to lay it.

Spice piles of brick in front of otherwise completed houses are a familiar sight around southeastern Michigan.

SO WHAT'S happened to all the masons?

"Since the 1974-75 recession, many masons left the business and went to Ford and other companies and didn't come back," said Richard Sewab, president of Great Lakes Homes in Farmington Hills.

Mason shortages are partially responsible for the three-month delays Great Lakes has experienced in delivering their finished house to the consumer.

Sewab's company builds houses in Rochester and sections of Macomb County. A qualified mason may demand 30 percent more for his labor this year than he did in 1975, he said.

A mason averages \$200 per thousand bricks he lays, Sewab said.

"The mason shortages are very serious, we have many houses completely finished on the inside but no brick," said George Torrente, president of Galaxy Homes, a home builder

in Troy, West Bloomfield, Sterling Heights and Avon Township.

"The results is the customer can't move into the home. There's no closing, so we can't pay the contractor. Last year, we had the same problem," Torrente said.

The average home in West Bloomfield, for example, requires 30,000 to 35,000 bricks, and masonry crews dictate the time spent on each job.

"No two crews are alike. The hours depend on the individuals themselves. A crew of three brothers, who split the profits, may lay 3,000 in one day."

"A mason being paid by the hour may only lay 700 in a day," Torrente said.

EMPLOYERS UNWILLINGNESS to hire mason apprentices is another cause for the masonry shortage, said Louis Scheich of the Mason Contractors Association.

The association has 51 apprentices, but the contractors don't want to bother training them, he claimed. There are 1,800 journeymen masons in the tri-county area.

Three weeks of practical training and three-years of on-the-job training plus two weeks of night school in the winter comprise the apprenticeship program.

If they get jobs, the men are paid \$8.52 per hour including benefits for the first six months then a five percent increase every six months. At the end of three years, they earn \$11.95 per hour.

As journeymen, they start at a base wage of \$11.56 plus fringe benefits.

Mother Nature has bitten many hands this season contributing to the building slow down. Local building codes require temperatures to be above freezing and the sky to be sunny in order for the masons to work, due to the calcium chloride in the mortar mix.

When the temperature dips below freezing, as it did most of this winter, the mortar mix doesn't harden adequately and eventually crumbles.

The house cost burden runs the gamut of passes for a panorama of reasons. Lay everything else, the buck stops with the consumer.

"Absolutely, the consumer has to expect to pay more with all these problems," Sewab said.



While there appears to be more than enough houses to go around, there's shortage of masons and bricks to complete the job. The coal strike, plus several other contributing factors, have created a shortage of that precious commodity that walls us in. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

Homeowners, animals block freeway

By CARL STODDARD

Few stretches of pavement have caused as much controversy as I-696, a freeway that has gone nowhere for 20 years.

"Lord only knows what's happening to I-696," laments Thomas Vukotich, director of Southfield's traffic division.

Federal highway officials are a little more optimistic. "It could be a relatively short time (before final approval)," said David Merchant, division administrator of the Federal Highway Administration in Lansing.

"Certainly, if everything is in shape, we could have it wrapped up in a year. But," he admits, "based on the past history of this thing, I wouldn't want to be too optimistic."

The freeway was first proposed in 1958 to link east to west in the Detroit

area. It got as far east as Southfield near Eleven Mile and Lahser. On the other end, it has been partly completed up to the county line on Dequindre. In between are 10 miles of conflicting reports and angry residents and a zoo full of animals.

THE FREEWAY has been the subject of frequent environmental impact statements. The last federal study was sent to the secretary of transportation last spring. That study was returned for still further investigation after the feds questioned the effect of the highway on the animals at the Detroit Zoo. The feds also suggested a new route "for the freeway where it crosses Greenfield."

In the original plan, the freeway cuts across Greenfield between Ten Mile and Lincoln. The feds, however, wondered if the freeway could be

placed at Ten Mile and Greenfield.

Southfield City Administrator Peter Cristiano answered that question last summer. "We believe severe negative benefits would result... from the selection of this alternative," he wrote.

Cristiano added that rerouting I-696 also would mean the elimination of about 54 homes, purchase of 19 vacant residential lots, a shopping center and a supermarket. Total cost: \$3.4 million, Cristiano said.

As for the zoo, state highway officials have already said they believe the highway could be built without causing unreasonable harm to the animals. Zoo officials, however, thought differently and labeled the proposal "fuzzy planning."

MEANWHILE, the members of the Michigan State Highway Dept. con-

tinued to develop a detailed answer to questions raised by the department of transportation. Merchant expects to have that study completed within a year. "I would hope it would be less than that," he said.

Even completion of the latest state study won't put I-696 on the road home. The completed study, the latest in a long series of impact statements, will be forwarded to the secretary of transportation in Washington D.C.

Upon approval, it would be sent to the regional administrator of the highway department for approval. After that, it still must go to the Environmental Protection Agency where public reaction would be requested.

If the impact statement passes all these points without deep objections being raised, I-696 could finally be a reality. But don't throw away your old freeway maps yet.



'Seesaw'

Vickie Emmert of Farmington Hills (left) rehearses with choreographer Kathy O'Neil of Northville on a dance for the Dearborn Civic Theater's Production of the musical "Seesaw." Performances are at the Osborn Center Theater, April 14, 15, 21-23, 28-30. For more information, call 584-1200, ext. 263.

Forum discusses humanist angle

Oakland Community College, in cooperation with the Michigan Council for Humanities, is presenting a series of forums by well-known national and local experts on humanizing education.

All events are free to the public.

The third presentation of the four-part series will feature William Pollard, community schools coordinator for the Public Schools of the District of Columbia. He will speak about humanistic answers to pressing problems in education.

The forum will present from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., April 22 in a Building of the Royal Oak campus of OCC, Washington and Lincoln.

Other featured speakers will include Dr. Derek Nunney, interim president of OCC, and Dr. Betty Setz, director of community relations and research administration at OCC.

For further information, call Dr. Virginia Svager at 548-1252.

The final forum will feature Stuart Rankin, assistant superintendent of Detroit Public Schools, speaking about current issue in education.

HE WILL discuss an agenda for the next 10 years.

The forum will be at 7:30 p.m., May 5, in the Student Activities Building of OCC's Highland Lakes campus, Union Lake. Rankin has designed or has been the primary contributor to the design of many city-wide programs. He created the concept of the magnet middle schools which were established under court order in 1972.

Rankin was instrumental in development of a comprehensive approach to local school curriculum planning in operation throughout the Detroit school system. Further information can be obtained by calling Dr. Charles Wynn, Highland Lakes campus, 363-7191.

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