

Complaint unit handles gripes

Here's how to cure new home blues

By RON GARBINSKI

Where do you turn when that dream house of your isn't everything you thought it would be?

Suppose the basement leaks, the roof isn't up to par or the porch is caving in. Or possibly the backyard isn't graded the best for drainage and the plaster on the walls is falling off.

When one considers all the new homes going up today, there are bound to be some problems or oversights.

So what can a new homeowner do if a builder doesn't respond to your call for help as quickly as you think he should?

One route is to contact the complaint office of the Residential Builders Division in Lansing. The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulation set up that division to handle new housing complaints.

If a complaint is filed with the unit, the division usually sends out an inspector to examine your problem. His report and your complaint are passed on to the builder if considered a reasonable gripe.

The builder, in turn, has 16 days to answer the complaint.

"USUALLY, THE builder will take care of the complaint right there," says Carl Campbell, administrative assistant for the complaint unit in Lansing.

"That's because the builder usually doesn't want to suffer the consequences of either having his license revoked or restricted," she adds.

But if the problem still persists, the complaint then goes to mediation where the builder and owner meet with a unit referee.

The builder has four chances to remedy the problem, Ms. Campbell continues. "If the owner still isn't satisfied, then formal licensing action can be started where the builder could lose his license."

"It's a very long process, but builders usually take care of the problem before then since he doesn't want to jeopardize his license. Sometimes formal action can take upwards

to a year or more. The department has some formal complaints dating back to 1973," Ms. Campbell explains.

Backlog of pending cases isn't the only concern of the unit. As of the end of September, the division had recorded more than 2,050 complaints from new homeowners against builders. That's quite a workload considering the division only handled 1,600 during 1977.

WHEN OUT LOOKING for a new home, one of the best ways to safeguard against potential construction complaints is to shop around for a recognized builder. Ms.

Campbell suggests that buyers check with the local building department to see what reputation the builder has in the community before making any commitment.

A new home buyer also should check with the Better Business Bureau and anyone else who has had experience with the builder.

The Complaint Unit is another good source for finding out about a builder.

To file a complaint or contact the unit, call 517-374-9625 or write Complaint Analysis Unit, 808 Southland Ave., Lansing, 48909.

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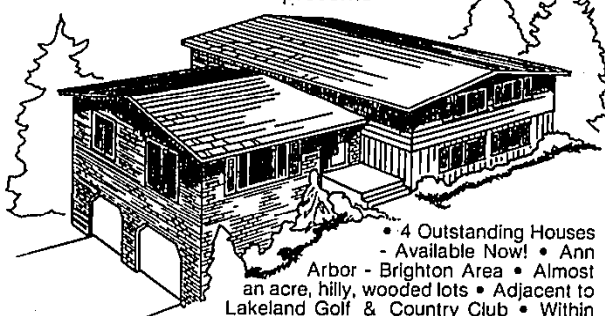
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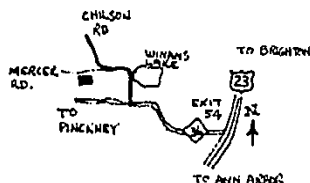


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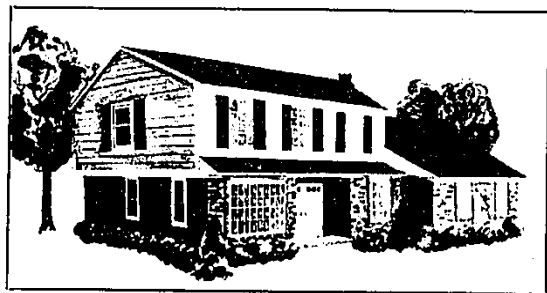
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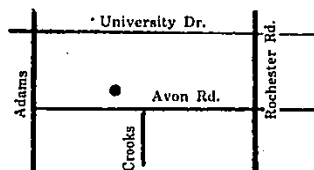
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