

Building Scene

Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300

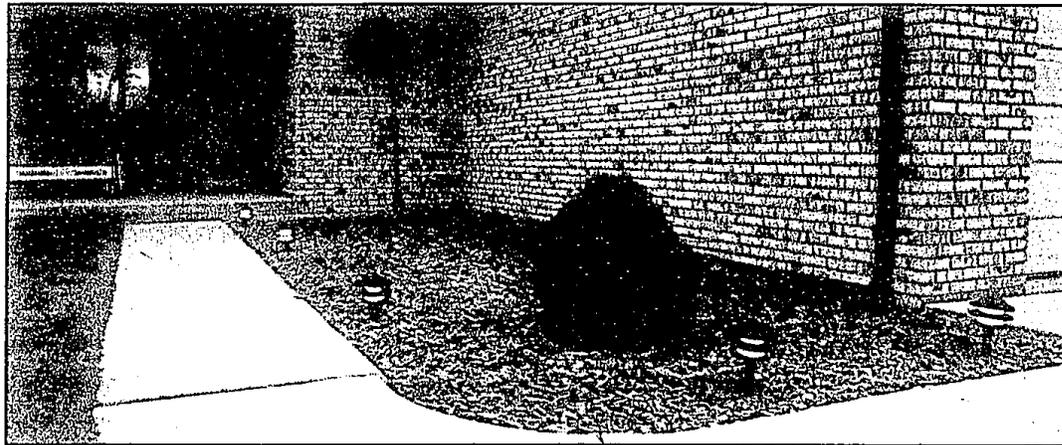
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Low voltage lamps shed new light on yards



GUY WARREN/staff photographer

The front walkway of Jim and Sylvia Skelton's Westland home is illuminated by low-voltage lighting. The outdoor lighting is becoming quite popular, though some homeowners use it for decoration while others use it for security.

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Look for low voltage outdoor lighting systems to start sprouting in neighborhoods as the temperature rises, days lengthen and we spend more time outside working and playing.

Low-voltage lights, fixtures 12 to 18 inches above ground level, are powered by a transformer plugged into a standard wall outlet. It can be activated by switch, timer or photo-electric cell.

Fairly inexpensive, a set of 10 plastic lamps with 100 feet of cable and a transformer with a timer can be purchased for \$80.

They have both a decorative and safety function.

Jim and Sylvia Skelton recently built a house in Westland. Sylvia was immediately attracted to low voltage outdoor lighting after getting a look at the system of her mother-in-law's neighbor.

"I WANTED it for decoration and

when I saw how dark it (sidewalk) was, I wanted it for safety, too," she said. "I think they're very attractive."

The Skeltons, still landscaping, have positioned lights to accentuate several trees and plan to add more along a pond and stream in their yard.

William and Louise Scherer of Redford, owners of an older house on a corner lot, were concerned about safety.

"It's a dark corner," William said.

"It (system) lights the sidewalk when you walk around. My porch is built so someone could hide underneath, so we put a light under there."

Different kinds of fixtures throw different patterns of light. One manufacturer, Intermatic, offers a Malibu line that includes tier light, flood light, mushroom light, globe light and well light.

A TYPICAL lamp is one-sixth to one-quarter as bright as a 75-watt light, Intermatic reports.

It costs \$15 to \$25 per year for electricity to operate a typical strand of four low voltage fixtures, said Joan Bradley, a lighting specialist for Detroit Edison.

Another big attraction of low voltage lighting is the ease of installation. "You don't need a permit. You or I could install it comfortably," Bradley said.

Most people get a transformer with a timer, said Phil Kinzer, marketing manager for Intermatic. "It's straightforward, easy to do. It doesn't leave lights on all night," he said.

Other buyers prefer a power source with an on-off switch right on the transformer. Others like a photocell.

Still others have more sophisticated hook-ups and tap into indoor switches that also may be connected to regular outdoor spotlights.

UPWARDS OF 70 percent of all sales are to individuals, the rest to contractors, Kinzer said. "Most of ours are do-it-yourself, people working on their yards."

That includes people who build new or move into used houses.

A big reduction in price — more than 100 percent in some cases — over the past decade has sparked consumer interest in the product. It's been around for some 25 years.

A Christmas promotion through K mart a couple of years ago "did quite well" and proved that low voltage lighting sales could be a year-around proposition even in northern climates, Kinzer said.

"This is something people see in magazines, on TV or at a neighbor's house and say, 'This is a good idea. This is pretty,'" said Jim McPherson, home center manager for the Livonia K mart.

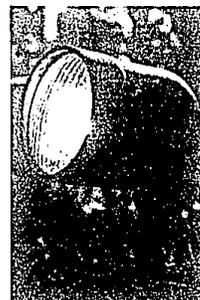
"The primary reason people enjoy it is landscape beautification," Kinzer said. "The next reason is safety. You don't want to trip on a bicycle or skateboard, a crack in the sidewalk. Lighting, by its very nature, is a security product."

Replacement parts and more powerful transformers are available separately.

The biggest mistake consumers make is trying to get too many lights on one transformer, cautioned Tom Ostrenga, an electrical consultant at Builders Square of Livonia.



Tier lights are one of the most popular forms of low-voltage lighting designs.



The floodlight design provides brightness to highlight shrubs, trees and fences.



Solar-powered lights are another option that requires no wiring.

MUST group works to smooth over construction union image

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

Southeast Michigan union workers someday will get an equal chance at construction jobs. And someday, building owners and developers won't need to worry about unnecessary work stoppages and jurisdictional disputes.

Someday is still not today.

Management and Unions Serving Together (MUST), a coalition of unionized contractors in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties and building trades managers, was formed in December 1988 to remove the impression that southeast Michigan has a bad business and labor climate with over-priced union work.

This is not going to happen overnight or over the course of several months, according to Thomas Miner, MUST executive director.

"These things we're talking about took years to create," Miner said.

The relationship between worker and manager constantly is evolving, but it is still largely an adversarial one, Miner said. Working together — the ultimate goal of MUST — is made more difficult by this antagonism.

"I'm hopeful that as we go down the line we won't have owners with preconceived notions about union work and unionized contractors will have a fair shot at jobs. That would be MUST's greatest accomplishment," he said.

Raymond Glowski, Detroit Building Trades Council secretary-treasurer and co-chair of MUST, said he is pleased with the progress of MUST thus far, but added there hasn't been a great deal of movement.

"THE WHOLE point behind this is selling unionism, and to an extent we've done that," Glowski said.

Regular meetings with builders and communication between the two sides has improved builder perception of union labor. It's difficult to gauge the effects of that communication, Glowski said, especially in the typically slow winter building months.

"But just the fact that we're talking, letting our hair down and letting each other know what's bothering us is a good sign."

regulation and the ground work was expected to take at least that long.

"We knew it was going to take at least 15 to 18 months before we'd be able to see concrete results," he said. The winter construction period and the economy slowdown may make determining the results even more difficult.

"Realistically, not enough has been done to tell if we've succeeded (in any way)," Miner said.

The fact that MUST exists is proof of good intentions and having the two sides communicating is progress, though concrete solutions and accomplishments are not as easy to identify, he said.

"It's really too early to be talking about victories. We'd like to get rid of the adversarial relationship between union contractors and owners — to get rid of strikes," he said. "I mean, there will always be strikes involving contract negotiations, but to get rid of unnecessary strikes."

The management/labor relationship has improved over the years, Glowski believes, and that should help dispel the impression that southeastern Michigan has a poor business and labor climate.

GLOWSKI SAID the builders and unions will contribute additional funding this year to ensure MUST's continued existence. "I would say somewhere in the neighborhood as last year, about \$70,000."

"I really don't think the relationship was that bad to begin with," Glowski said, adding the adversarial relationship was more perception than reality.

Perceptions, however, can have an effect.

"I'd like to drive down the street and point at every construction job and be able to say that's 100 percent union, but that wasn't the case."

At one time, union workers were involved in every construction job, but in recent years that hasn't been the case, Glowski said. Glowski said he couldn't quantify the percentage of work that was going to non-union workers, but it was enough to realize there was a problem.

MUST board members meet monthly and regularly invite owners to come in and discuss their problems with unionized labor, Miner said. "How can we fix something if

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