

Witness

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"One thing that has affected our business is the economy. People aren't getting paid as readily and that has resulted in more litigation," Facca said.

Facca explained the lean foreclosure process.

"A developer hires a general contractor. They agree on a price. The guy pays 90 percent but withholds the last 10 percent. The general contractor can file a lien to collect the last 10 percent. Most owners will come up with the money at that point," Facca said.

Structural defects like a lanky roof, architectural problems like not complying with handicapped codes are other reasons to go to court, he said.

"The biggest dispute bringing homeowners to court involves not defining well enough what they

want the builder to do," Facca said. "Be clear and specific. Be careful in choosing your builder. Ask houses he has built and talk to the owners."

Lester Burton has seen a lion's share of building-related disputes as a former chairman of the Builders and Contractors State Licensing Board.

"Poor communication between the builder and homeowner is the main problem," said Burton, of Burton Shire in Bingham Farms.

"Since our company was established by my father in 1905, we've built 10,000 homes and never had a lawsuit," Burton said. "When a homeowner is unhappy, we satisfy him. It isn't worth fighting over a few hundred dollars. We and many other home builders will meet a homeowners' complaint. Those that end up in court, you're

usually dealing with a stubborn builder."

Builders in dispute over money owed "have inadequate financing or they're being an SOB. There are a lot of bad people out there," said Burton, a former president of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

Chuck Bredenstein teaches courses for construction and real estate license training for NCI Associates. Clients range from laborers to engineers.

"I made a decision years ago not to go to court as an expert witness. Because of the complexity of construction, there's a wide margin for error. It's too easy to be critical," said Bredenstein. "The problem is there is no dispute resolution plan for the building industry. Problems get blown out of proportion that could've been resolved without going to court."

Bredenstein has degrees in education and technical training. He has been a course writer and presenter since 1979.

"Unless you've got an attorney who has a background in construction, you could end up in litigation for years."

Kids 'blocked' toward careers

By MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER

Imagine being a kid and being urged to play with blocks.

That's what's in store for 200 elementary schoolchildren Feb. 27 when the National Association of Women in Construction sponsors a block building contest at Northland Mall in Southfield.

"Those of us involved in the building business saw a need to communicate the positive aspects of a future in construction," said Christy Winter, event chairwoman.

It will be the first time metro Detroit will play host to the national contest. Contestants will be students in grades one through six chosen from four Detroit public schools — Priest, Houghton, McCullough elementary and Maybury Multicultural.

"We want kids to stay in school, to target them early to consider the building trades," said Sarah Keiser, president elect of NAWIC Detroit chapter.

Keiser of Livonia works in property management consulting. She describes NAWIC as "a nice network of professional women, many who own their own busi-

nesses." It represents engineers, accountants, architects, draftspersons, inspectors and appraisers.

The contest was instituted to make the public more aware of the construction industry. The contest began in 1980. NAWIC used building blocks in contests around the country as a vehicle to motivate children toward the construction industry. Kids built spaceports, airports, castles, playgrounds and other structures with the borrowed building blocks.

"Once children are allowed to use their imagination and develop their abilities, using skills as well as education, the sky's the limit," said Winter, a past NAWIC director.

"This is the first time the contest is being held in the Detroit area, but it looks like it will be held again next year," said Keiser. She said the contest in the past was aimed at junior high level students, but the association found older children often have their career choices made.

Although the contest is spon-

sored by a professional women's organization, Keiser said the contest is open to boys and girls.

"The school district is using this as a positive thing for children who have done well," she said.

"We hope this will raise their self-esteem and at the same time show them there is a whole industry out there to be considered. It might give them a broader idea of what to do with their lives."

There will be first prize winners in each class with the best being selected as a grand prize-winner of a \$50 savings bond and a chance for the entry to go onto a regional contest.

Each child entered will receive gifts and awards provided by the sponsors and patrons. Speakers will stress the importance of staying in school and concentrating on math, sciences and computers.

The public is welcome to view the contest, which will begin at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 27, at Northland Mall.

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