

At Home

Thursday, May 23, 2002

APPLIANCE DOCTOR



JOE GAGNON

Be an informed consumer to avoid repairs

A day doesn't go by without me getting two to six voice mail messages about hot water tanks and defective dip tubes. These people haven't heard about the problem nor do they know that the whole thing was settled in court. Manufacturers are no longer paying for repairs.

An estimated 18 million homeowners did not replace their dip tubes when they should have — by the end of the year 2000.

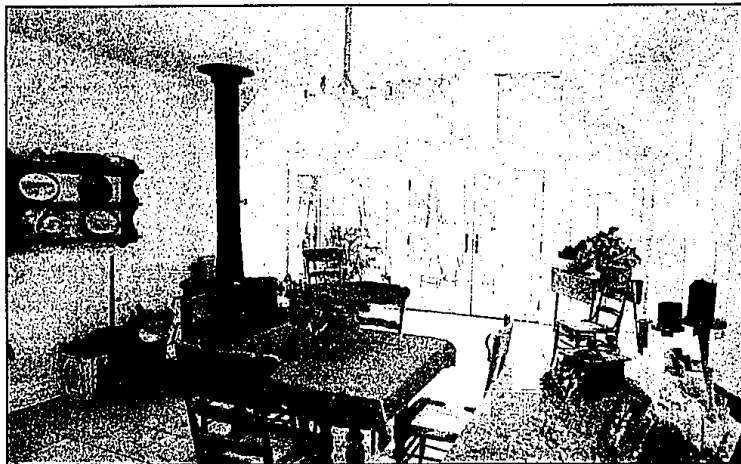
I've learned that many of these folks purchased a new washer or dishwasher during the past few years. If they cleaned the screen on the water valve they wouldn't have had to replace their appliances. I tell them the defective dip tube sends out little white flakes that plug up everything hot water flows through. These conversations prove over and over that an uneducated consumer is a confused one.

I'm now going to tell you a little story to explain the importance of being an informed consumer. The story concerns General Electric or Hotpoint washing machines from the 1960s through 1980s. If I should happen to come down with cancer in my coming years, and a doctor can prove that it was caused by asbestos, I am going to file suit against the General Electric Company.

For many years I repaired the clutch assembly on these washers which had several brake shoes made of asbestos. Every time I did this I would blow out the fine dust that accumulated during the years of wear. I used compressed air like all appliance shops do in the repair business. The dust I was breathing was pure asbestos, the same stuff that was introduced into millions of laundry rooms across America for 25 years.

In the past 10 years General Electric hasn't used a clutch assembly like I describe, and in the 1980s, they changed the material on the brake shoes. They had to because asbestos was proven dangerous, but do you think anything was ever publicized about the subject? I don't think so folks and what you are reading here today is very similar to the way the defective dip tube story in hot water tanks was revealed to the American public. The story was published in this paper before it appeared on national TV across the country. Be an informed consumer. Most people aren't, which helps explain why 18 million consumers didn't get the dip tube repaired on their hot water tank repaired for free. Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon can be heard Saturday and Sunday on 760 WJR. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. His phone number is (313) 873-9789.



STAFF PHOTOS BY STEVE CANTRELL

Like new: Above, The Cooks' family room reflects a mixture of old and new charm. Top, a 19th century house at 81 N. Main in Clarkston sparkles on a recent sunny spring afternoon.

Historic Cook house altered little by 3 owners

The home of Bob and Mary Alice Cook at 81 North Main in downtown Clarkston sits directly across the street from another historic building: the Independence Township Hall.

Politics don't go on inside the Cooks' home, but it is a white house with long term links.

The Cooks purchased the home in 1980 for \$82,000 from the estate of Viola Alger Walter, the second wife and widow of Guy Walter.

The couple was the second generation of Walters to have lived there. Guy Walter purchased the home in 1909 from his parents, Nelson and Josie Ainsworth Walter, the original owners starting in 1883.

Nelson Walter was the son of early Clarkston settlers Jacob and Sarah Clark Walter.

The home, trimmed in green, is one of five homes featured June 1-2 in this year's Clarkston Home Tour XX, a fund-raiser that benefits Clarkston SCAMP, a summer day camp for children with special needs.

That only three sets of families have lived in the 2,400-square-foot building says something for its character. The Cooks are empty nesters now, with their two grown sons out of the house and starting their own families.

The original section of the home was built in Gothic Revival style. In 1905 the front porch was put in, Colonial Revival style.

Architecturally the original portions of the house were Gothic Revival style with pierced barge boards under the steeply pitched gable and tall slender windows typical of the style.

Home improvements were big news in that day. An item in the April 6, 1905, *Oakland County Post* reported, "Mrs. Nelson Walter is building a new porch on her home on Main Street."

Mary Alice Cook says there's something about the charm of the front porch, even today.

"We live on the front porch, even with traffic," she said.

The property is 300 feet by 100 feet and backs up to the Mill Pond.

The Cooks have made moderate

renovations, such as turning a downstairs master bedroom into a den, and adding about 10 feet onto the kitchen in the southeast side of the home.

Please see HOME, C2



In order: The living room inside the Cook house is homey and elegant.

Leaving a light on: Clarkston ushers in Home Tour 2002

Clarkston Home Tour celebrates 20 years of history when five families open their doors to the public the first weekend in June. The annual event is again a benefit for Clarkston SCAMP, a summer camp for those with special needs in Oakland County.

Five homes have been selected in the Village of Clarkston and Independence Township for show in this event, including the historic home that has been transformed into the Clarkston Conservatory of Music, a historic home built during the Civil War era, and an 1860s farm house.

Saturday, June 1

Check in runs from 5:46-7 p.m. at Depot Park in downtown Clarkston. Advance reservations are required for the premier showing, which includes a champagne and hors d'oeuvres reception at Thomaville Home Furnishings of Clarkston, 7550 Dixie Highway. Tickets for the reception are \$65 for silver patrons, \$100 for gold patrons and \$150 for platinum patrons. Call (248) 620-1882.

Sunday, June 2

Check in runs from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Depot Park. Lunch at Mesquite Creek Steakhouse, at 1-75 and Ortonville Road, is included in the afternoon tour. Advance reservations are recommended. Donation is \$25 or \$22 for senior citizens. Call (248) 620-1882. Reservations for both events can be made by sending a check to Clarkston SCAMP, 6590 Middle Lake Road, Clarkston.

Gardens with the most feature compost

Each year it seems as though more gardeners are making compost. Why? Because they have learned that compost not only enriches the soil as it slowly releases nutrients, but also improves soil structure and texture, holds moisture, improves drainage, moderates soil temperature, encourages beneficial earthworms, and suppresses soil-borne diseases.

There's no exact "recipe" for compost as each pile is different, but a mixture of 25-percent dried leaves, 25-percent grass and 25-percent soil, plus air and water, is recommended.

Wet, shredded newspapers, uncoated cardboard, wood ash and dried flowers are also suitable.

Avoid mold, dairy products, diseased plants, invasive plants, weed seeds, poison sumac and ivy, pesticide-treated plants and grass clippings, pressure-treated wood scraps and sawdust, horse chestnut seeds and sweet

gum balls. Ideally the pile should be no larger than 3- by 3- by 3- feet in size and built on the ground so worms, insects and other microbes can enter the pile through the bottom. This speeds up the decomposition and allows air to enter. Earthworms are vital to composting because they aerate the pile and add many nutrients with their castings (waste).

Water is very important and can be applied with a garden hose. To be sure that the water adheres to the dried leaves, use a bucket for the water and add about a teaspoon of liquid Ivory or Dawn dishwashing liquid to the water so it will penetrate the surface of the leaves.

Ideally, the pile should be as moist as a wet sponge and, when squeezed,

no water drips out.

Worms

I mentioned the importance of worms. Composting with worms, vermicomposting, can be accomplished indoors in a container as small as 2 cubic feet.

Kitchen waste, redworms (check your local bait store or order them through the mail), newspapers and some soil, plus bedding material, air and water are the ingredients. The finished product is very rich in nutrients.

You may wonder where all these worms come from. I visited the DMF Bait Co. in Waterford, a wholesale supplier of Canadian night crawlers.

Please see FISH, C2