

## Take guesswork out of choosing a remodeler

For many homeowners, the new year brings with it thoughts of home improvement, perhaps a new deck, a bigger kitchen or even a three-room addition.

But then you hear the bad news — "remodelers" who accepted large down payments and then skipped town, new roofs that collapse under the weight of a heavy snowfall, and jobs begun but never completed. It's enough to make any body wary.

"The good news, though, is that by asking the right questions and looking in the right places, you can find a professional who will do an excellent job that both raises your home's value and makes it more enjoyable for many years to come," said Dan MacLish, president of Building Industry Association of Southeastern Michigan (BIA) and of MacLish Building Inc. in Troy.

BIA offers the following suggestions to ensure that your remodeling job is smooth sailing.

Don't conduct business with any remodeler or contractor without first investigating his or her reputation and experience. Price alone isn't an indication of the remodeler's competency or ability to complete your project.

When searching for a contractor, it is best to seek referrals from family, friends, neighbors and co-workers who have had remodeling work done. Ask if they are satisfied with their project and with the remodeler they hired.

Also, check with local trade organizations, such as BIA's Web site [www.builders.org](http://www.builders.org), for the names of members who offer remodeling services. Membership in these organizations indicates a remodeler's

commitment to professional customer service and quality construction.

It is also a sign that the remodeler is an established member of the local building community.

Call your local building department or Better Business Bureau to investigate whether any complaints have been filed against the contractor and not resolved.

Ask the contractor to give you a copy of their Michigan Contractor's License before you sign their agreement. Michigan law requires that all building, remodeling, and maintenance and alteration contractors be licensed by the state.

Ask for a copy of the remodeler's insurance certificates to verify that he/she carries insurance that protects you from claims arising from property damage or job site injuries.

When evaluating bids from contractors, make sure that they are based on identical project specifications.

Although it is common practice to make a down payment when you sign a remodeling contract, you should be especially wary of any remodeler who asks for full payment before the job has begun.

A payment schedule should be part of your written agreement with the remodeler and may, for example, be tied to completing various stages of the job.

If you sign a contract in your home that is offered through door-to-door solicitation, always remember that the Federal Trade Commission's "Cooling Off" rule gives you the right to cancel the agreement within 72 hours, provided that you haven't allowed the contractor to begin work on the project.

## 9/11 changed families forever

The morning of Sept. 11, 2001, I was in my sport utility driving to a Detroit Women Writers meeting when I turned on the radio to listen to the morning news.



Celebrating Family  
Lisa Luckow-Healy

Breaking news of an aircraft hitting one of the twin towers of the World Trade Center had just interrupted the local broadcast.

Reporters and government officials were speculating on the nature of the crash — whether it truly was an accident or an attack on America.

Minutes later, suspicion arose that there might be no more to this than a freak accident. My jaw dropped and tense feelings came over me when I heard the news of the subsequent tower attack.

I arrived at my destination to be greeted by somber faces from my fellow colleagues. Who could concentrate on budget issues and a planning session under the circumstances?

I periodically gravitated to a nearby television, only to see the aftermath of the attack on the Pentagon and the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsing.

I called my husband at work. We talked about what was going on around us. Would there be more attacks? Should we pick up our children from school?

I hung up and immediately called my children's school. I was told they were in lock-down procedures and staying put for the moment. My mind raced. I wondered if I should I go pick up my children.

Instinct told me both "yes" and to wait.

Shortly thereafter, I left my meeting, glued to my radio as I drove home. Thoughts of the tragedies, of the innocent people who fell victim to the attacks, raced through my mind — people just like my family who went to work or about their daily routines without a clue of their fate.

While en route, I called my sister to see if she had heard anything from a relative working in the Pentagon. She told me he was very close to the crash site, but managed to escape unharmed.

I arrived home and hugged my daughter. I didn't want to let go. As I embraced her, I thought about the families who wouldn't get a hug from a loved one that night. They were just like the rest of us, getting up in the morning to fulfill their daily routines — to kiss their families good-bye, commute to their places of business, drop their children off at daycare, or get onto an airplane for business or pleasure.

Later that afternoon, I rushed to the school to pick up my two other children. The staff had explained to the older students, in age-appropriate fashion, that something terrible had happened in our country that morning. I had never witnessed so many parents hug their children so tightly the moment the school bell rang.

On Sept. 11, 2001, we suddenly realized just how vulnerable we all were, despite the fact that we lived in the United States of America and believed attacks like those of the day weren't supposed to happen to us. For a moment, a day and onward, people across this country realized our nation had come together as one — without barriers between different walks of life — to rescue, recover and grieve.

We took the time to do any-

thing in our power to help the families victimized by the terrorists and the communities working hard to support the recovery effort.

One year later, we look at our families and count our blessings. We honor those innocent lives taken by the horrific acts of terrorism. We search for words to thank the thousands of people who put themselves in and gave of their time to rescue and recover in the aftermath.

Hug your children today. Tell them you love them. Make time for a date night with your spouse. Don't take your family

life for granted. If you are guilty of getting caught up in family routines that leave you stressed out and overworked, take a moment, an hour or a day off to stop and enjoy what you and your family have together. Throw out a grudge in favor of making amends.

Stop to reflect — and light a candle to honor the victims of 9/11.

To leave Lisa Luckow-Healy a message from a touch-tone phone about how you celebrate family, call (734) 953-2047, or e-mail your suggestions for future family topics to [lakehealy@comcast.net](mailto:lakehealy@comcast.net).

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## Test reveals paint type

AP WEEKLY FEATURES

You're getting ready to paint your house and you aren't certain what type of paint to buy.

The important question is which type of paint currently covers your home. Here's an easy way to find out. First, scrub a small sample area with a strong solution of common household detergent. Rinse the area with plenty of fresh water and towel-dry it. Then, rub a cotton ball soaked in alcohol over the cleaned area. If the paint comes off, it's latex, and if it doesn't, it's oil-base.

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Even on smaller jobs you save a lot. Enough to buy a new BBQ, back-to-school clothes, pay off a debt... or a romantic getaway weekend at a nice hotel. You can add an extra level to your deck, or get new patio furniture.

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The roots of your lawn grow as deep as the grass grows tall, so taller grass has deeper, healthier roots. Keep your lawn 3" or higher and never cut off more than 1/3 of the blade each time you mow. A healthy lawn tolerates hot, dry weather better — so you won't need to spend your summer watering and fertilizing.

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A partnership of the Wayne County Department of Environment, Range Watershed communities and agencies. Friends of the Rouge USEPA and MDEQ Want more information? Call (888) 323-3283 or check our website at [www.waynecounty.com](http://www.waynecounty.com)

This ad was adopted from the Rouge River Watershed Council and is funded in part by the Rouge River National Water Conservation Program.

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