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LIFESTYLE NEWS

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Call before you build

Family says do homework to avoid renovation rip-offs

BY MIKE PEARSON
NEWS STAFF

When the Ohanian family decided to renovate their home, they thought everything would be taken care of by a well-known, trusted and highly-skilled contractor. The family chose the same company they used for a renovation project in 2001. The contractor seemed professional. The company had its own custom showroom, was well advertised and sales people said all the right things. The company offered to look after all the required permits and approvals.

"We live in troubled economic times. Society has changed...trust should never be blindly given."

"They seemed to be really professional," said homeowner Vicki Ohanian.

Vicki and her husband, Anthony, hired the company to install a powder room last fall.

The project started out well, but problems quickly arose.

The contractor would often arrive at 10:30 a.m. and leave by 2 p.m. After quoting the family a one-week time frame, the job took six weeks.

Then the unexpected happened. The ceiling collapsed above the kitchen, revealing the contractor's shoddy work from 2001. The family spent an entire weekend without electricity and water. They also noticed a strange smell, which turned out to be an open sewer line that was emitting noxious methane gas. The contractor installed illegal wiring and also compromised the structural integrity of the floor joists.

After calling their contractor and receiving no immediate response, the Ohanians turned to Hamilton contractor Bobby Assadourian of Triple R Inc. They saw Assadourian on one of his regular home renovation segments on Cable 14's Hamilton Life. Assadourian co-authored a book with Trevor Bouchard called *A Contractor You Can Bring Home to Mom*, which helps homeowners avoid renovation rip offs.

After visiting the Ohanian home and seeing the work of the previous contractor, Assadourian was appalled.

"They were going to put a toilet into the weeping tile," said Assadourian. "That's totally illegal."

After assuring the Ohanians that all the permits would be taken care of, the first contractor illegally began work without permits.

Assadourian later obtained a permit for the powder room, as well as a second permit to correct the substandard work of the previous contractor. Just before Christmas, a city inspector gave the project a final approval and the Ohanians finally had their house back, just in time for the holidays.

If you're planning to renovate your home this year, Assadourian has a few helpful tips to follow before you begin. First, call the City of Hamilton at 905-546-2424 and find out if your project requires a building permit. Don't count on the contractor to check for permit requirements, because the liability ultimately rests with the homeowner. Once you've called a few contractors and priced the job, ask your contractor for references. Also ask your contractor if the company carries workplace liability insurance. The city can also tell you whether a contractor is licensed. A licensed contractor must undergo a police background check for any criminal activity.

Sadly, as Assadourian points out, not all contractors are worthy of trust. He advises customers not to blindly hire the biggest, most advertised firm without first doing some research.

"This isn't the world of the forties and fifties," he said. "We live in troubled economic times. Society has changed... Trust should never be blindly given."

When the kitchen ceiling collapsed, the Ohanians' first contractor advised the family to seek compensation through their homeowner's insurance. Assadourian assumes the contractor had no liability insurance.

Assadourian's book, co-authored by Trevor Bouchard of consulting firm Quick Contractors, is full of tips on how to hire a professional, skilled contractor.

The paperback edition of *A Contractor You Can Bring Home to Mom* is available at selected Chapters, Coles and Indigo book stores and online from Lulu.com. The book sells for $18.40 and all proceeds support the Ontario March of Dimes, a charity that helps adults with physical disabilities.

PHOTO BY MIKE PEARSON

From left, Vicki Ohanian, Bobby Assadourian and Anthony Ohanian stress the importance of calling the city and checking a contractor's credentials before beginning any job.

BOWLING

Roll & Bowl benefits paraplegic association

Register now for the first Roll & Bowl tournament for the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Ontario Hamilton Region.

The bowling tournament, which runs Saturday, Jan. 8 at Splitsville Entertainment Complex on Stone Church Road in Hamilton, is a bowling tournament for players of any skill or ability

Registration begins at noon, with bowling at 1 p.m. The tournament will wrap up with awards and prizes at 4 p.m.

See www.cpaont.org/hamilton.

The cost to participate is $25 per bowler in pledges raised, $125 per team. The event is open for individual players or teams of five. Registration includes bowling, shoe rental, food, prizes and the iPod Pin Challenge sponsored by Alert Best Healthcare. For further information, contact Chelsea Crealock at 905-516-7774 or by email Chelsea.crealock@cpaont.org.

ENTERTAINMENT

Choir needs tenors

The Mohawk College Community Choir is looking for tenors.

Mozart's Requiem and Poulenc's Gloria concert are planned for early May. Rehearsals take place every Wednesday, 7:30-10 p.m. at Mohawk College, Fennell Campus, in Room F118. Auditions are by appointment only. Call Louise at 905-526-7938 or see www.mohawkcollege.ca/mohawkchoir.

ENTERTAINMENT

Roasting mayor Fred

Tickets are now on sale for FROAST, a tribute roast to former Hamilton mayor Fred Eisenberger.

The televised event will be held Tuesday, Feb. 1, 8 p.m., at the Westside Concert Theatre, 434 King St. W., Hamilton. FROAST will include roasts by Larry Difanni, Andrea Horvath, Mark Chamberlain, Chris Charlton, Ron Foxcroft, Charles Juravinski and Rob MacIsaak, as well as a musical performance by former Mayor Bob Morrow. Tickets are $75 and include food and entertainment. Proceeds will be donated to help offset Eisenberger's election debt. Visit fredeisenberger.ca or call 905-574-3733.

Hamilton International Airport celebrates the city's first flights to Cuba

Passengers Jasmine and Alex board for a holiday to Cuba from Hamilton.

John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport has celebrated its first flights to Cuba with Cuban tour specialist Hola Sun Holidays.

Travellers are heading to the warm sun with the new weekly non-stop flights now available between Hamilton and Cayo Coco and Holguin.

"Flying from Hamilton to Cuba is going to be a breeze this winter with new weekly direct flights," said Karen Medweth, director, marketing for the airport.

"...Southern Ontario residents love the opportunity to fly to these two beautiful locations from the convenient location of Hamilton.

Jorge Felix Salazar, president of Hola Sun, said Cuba is fast becoming the world's favourite fun and sun vacation spot, and Holguin and Cayo Coco are two of the nicest areas.

All-inclusive packages to Cayo Coco and Holguin are perfect for families seeking a warm, mid-winter getaway.

Flights run until April 21 and depart each Wednesday.

Packages start from $518 per person for a seven-night stay and include direct flights and accommodation, plus a free nature or city tour complements of Hola Sun.

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