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Do it yourself and avoid unscrupulous contractors

Stoney Creek contractor hosts Cable 14's Just Ask Bob

By Mike Pearson, News staff

When it comes to your next home renovation project, you can pay a contractor in cash or take your chances with a random company from the telephone listings.

But if you're looking to save a few dollars, Bobby Assadourian has a better idea.

"You can cut the crooked contractor right out of the equation and do it yourself," said Assadourian, a Stoney Creek contractor and host of Cable 14's Just Ask Bob.

Assadourian shows homeowners how to renovate and maintain their homes themselves with his weekly, 30-minute program every Monday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. and again at 10:30 p.m. Just Ask Bob is taped in Assadourian's own home workshop.

While he may be under-cutting his own business, Assadourian has spent years advocating for the consumer. He co-authored a book with Trevor Bouchard called A Contractor You Can Bring Home to Mom, advising consumers on how to avoid home renovation rips-offs.

Every penny of the book's purchase price supports the Ontario March of Dimes.

As a contractor licensed by the city of Hamilton, Assadourian stands behind all of his work. While his show offers an opportunity to raise his public profile, he isn't looking to boost his own business. He volunteers his time as the show's host and never solicits business. By showing homeowners how to maintain and renovate their homes themselves or hire a legitimate contractor, Assadourian helps consumers avoid home renovation horror stories.

On his weekly TV show, Assadourian has covered topics like plumbing, drywall installation and roofing maintenance. But even if you're doing it yourself, you may still require a building permit. If you're not sure, a quick call to the city's building department can steer you in the right direction.

If you decide to hire a contractor, Assadourian recommends calling the city's licensing department at 905-546-2424 to find out if the contractor is licensed. Hamilton is one of a select few municipalities which offers a Master Building Repair license program, but many contractors continue to skirt the regulations.

"Homeowners seek out unlicensed contractors because they're cheap," said Assadourian.

When the harmonized sales tax was first applied to home renovation projects in 2010, the underground economy grew even more.

As a legitimate, licensed contractor, Assadourian collects taxes and won't accept money under the table. Sometimes that puts him at a disadvantage.

But consumers who sign with a licensed contractor like Assadourian also receive a written contract, a cooling off period to cancel the contract in accordance with provincial legislation and a guarantee that the job will be completed by certified professionals.

With a cash deal consumers often get only a promise with nothing to back it up. Sometimes contractors will take the money and run.

Sadly, some consumers call Assadourian when they've already been ripped off by an unscrupulous contractor. Some homeowners contact him seeking urgent renovations to correct the shoddy work of another contractor. While he would love to have a show like Extreme Makeover Home Edition, or Mike Holmes' Holmes on Homes, for now Assadourian enjoys helping Hamiltonians with DIY projects. He thanks Cable 14 producers Linda Rourke, Gail Granlund and Greg Ross for his TV opportunity.

If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Complete episodes from the first two seasons of Just Ask Bob are available at www.cable14.com

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Photo by Mike Pearson

Bobby Assadourian hosts Just Ask Bob Monday afternoons on Cable 14.

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