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Magazine

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SPRING 2018



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A SPIRITED APPROACH TO HOME BARS

2018 HOME & GARDEN EXPO

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Feature Home

(ON THE COVER)

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Joann and Kevin envisioned a 'Mountain Lodge meets the Beach' lake home. Builder Pennings and Sons made their dream home a reality. Maintenance-free exterior materials ensure the emphasis will be on fun at the lake rather than work.



Pools, Pools, Pools



A Spirited Approach to Home Bars



Home & Garden Expo Info and Map



Radon: What Lies Below May Harm You



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**PRINTING & MAILING
by JB PRINTING CO.***

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* JB Printing is an O'Keefe Publishing company,
and is the first printing company to be designated as
a Clean Corporate Citizen by the Michigan DEQ

Welcome Home Magazine© is published quarterly

Welcome Home Magazine

3111 Lake Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49048

Phone 269-547-0333 / 269-349-9601
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www.welcomehomekzoo.com

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It's all about you, *Kalamazoo*

Moving to the Kalamazoo area, with my parents in 1978 was an exciting time in my life. My older brother had just left for college and my dad wanted to move from Watervliet to the Kalamazoo area to be closer to his business. My dad had brought us many times to the "big city" of Kalamazoo to watch the K-Wings play hockey and to WMU football games, so I was excited to move. Having lived in the Kalamazoo area for 40 years and watching our community grow has been exciting.

My personal favorite list of 10 things I like about the Kalamazoo area are:

1. The people with Midwest values and work ethic
2. The very desirable cost of living
3. The beautiful lakes
4. The walking and biking trails provided
5. Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Valley Community College and Kalamazoo College
6. History of Kalamazoo businesses including Checker Motors, Upjohn, Bell's Brewery and Stryker
7. The world class restaurants
8. That Kalamazoo is a growing community
9. The choices for housing
10. All of the golf courses!!

As President of the Home Builders Association of Western Michigan, I have been able to share my passion for the area with residential home builders and remodelers. The HBA of Western Michigan is an organization that is committed to building homes and strengthening our community. There are two signature events the HBA of Western Michigan has every year.

The first event is the annual Home & Garden Expo held at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center from March 8th - 11th. This year's show will have over 130 exhibitors filling nearly 60,000 square feet of ideas, inspiration and new technology for homeowners. The show will also feature seminars that will help with projects around the house and "MarketKazoo" that will feature local businesses, artists, garden accessories, home décor and more!

Our second event is the annual Parade of Homes from June 8th - 16th. The Parade of Homes features new and remodeled residential homes that showcase the talents of our builder and remodeler members. Last year marked the completion of the Hospital Hospitality House. The seven bedroom residential home was completed in June 2017 and is being used by families of loved ones receiving medical treatment near Borgess Medical Center. The HBA of Western Michigan partnered with Hospitality House of Southwestern Michigan on this project.

The Kalamazoo area has a rich history of business and medical related talent. Our area is certainly a great place to live. The future is bright with the new Homer Stryker Medical School and new facilities at Pfizer and Stryker. I am proud to say "I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo," and we both love to live and work here.

Jerry Whitaker
President of the Home Builders
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A Spirited Approach to Home Bars

By Zinta Aistars

Sipping a cocktail at the end of a long work day or gathering good friends together for a cheerful evening—who wouldn't like to have a well-stocked and beautiful bar at home as a focal point? Setting up a home bar can be as simple as stocking a small cart on wheels with a few bottles and an ice bucket with glasses, to installing a full bar with mirrored hutch, complete with sink, taps, and refrigeration.

With plenty of ideas and building plans available online, building a home bar can be a fun do-it-yourself project—but not all of us are handy with a hammer and nails. Pour yourself a drink and consider your options.

FIRST, A FEW QUESTIONS

Wet bar or dry? A wet bar includes a sink with running water and drainage, making rinsing glasses or a pitcher easy to do without running to the kitchen. For that convenience, you will have to install the appropriate plumbing.

Will you want to include refrigeration? Keeping things cool without refilling an ice bucket can be convenient for that 12-pack of beers, and it's nice not to have the ice melt, too. Refrigeration, however, means you will have to consider electric outlets to power your refrigerator or wine cooler when deciding placement for your bar. You may also want to use a blender at your bar.

How many bottles and glasses? Think about how much storage space you will need in and on your bar.

How much space? Measure the area where you wish to install your bar to be sure proportions fit. While length and depth of your bar may vary with the space available, height should be at or near 42 inches, a height comfortable for most people.

NOW, LET'S GO SHOPPING

Watson's, a new home entertainment solutions store moved into the former ABC Warehouse building on South Westnedge in Portage. Home bars are only one of the many home entertainment items the chain store sells.

"When a customer first comes in, we talk about dimensions, where the home bar will be placed, colors, finishes,"

Melinda Tobin, sales associate, says. "We talk about whether there is a walk-out basement, which can be a popular location for home bars."

Watson's sells home bars from modest to massive, in a wide variety of styles to match any home décor. Manufacturers include American Heritage, California House, Eci, Artisan Home Furniture, and Sunny Designs.

"You can buy a bar from \$600 to as much as \$15,000. We do delivery and set-up for \$100," Tobin says. "Most of the bars we sell are stand-alone pieces, but there are front bars and back bars with hutches, sold separately or together."

Tobin says the current trend is for the distressed or white-washed look, although the industrial look is popular, too. An array of bar stools can be purchased separately.

"Our advantage at Watson's, because of the volume of our sales, is that we can offer more variety and more price points," Tobin says.

TAKING THE PARTY OUTDOORS

At Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet, manufactured in Galesburg, they are all about moving the fun outdoors. Known mainly for their custom-made, high-end grills, Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet designs and builds fully equipped outdoor kitchens, which can include refrigerators, wine chillers, a beverage center with keg tappers and ice makers, and outdoor-rated freezers, all built to match the cabinetry of your outdoor kitchen.

"Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet keg tappers are available in one or two taps," says Russ Faulk, chief designer and head of product. "Fifteen-inch models are single tap, and 24-inch models are single or double tap. Kalamazoo kegerators feature powerful compressors, forced-air cooling, and insulation that is 23 percent thicker than the competition, making them the best available. Our beer keg refrigerators will hold your favorite beers at the perfect temperature — even when summer heat climbs to 100° Fahrenheit."

When assessing a site in your backyard for an outdoor kitchen with bar, Faulk recommends checking to see that the area can be easily connected to home utilities, is level,

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convenient to your indoor kitchen, and is sheltered from weather, rain or shine.

Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet offers the services of designers to assist in creating an outdoor kitchen with a bar that will make you the envy of your neighborhood.

BECOMING A HOME BAR BARTENDER

With a beautiful bar set up either inside your home or out, it's time to kick back and enjoy a tasty drink. Angie Jackson calls herself the Elixir Fixer. The mixologist travels throughout Southwest Michigan offering guidance and teaching bartenders, culinary students, and group classes for anyone with an interest in learning how to mix a delicious cocktail.

"There's been a resurgence in mixed drinks that began in the late 80s," Jackson says. "As wines and craft beers have become more popular, sales for spirits dropped, but we are bringing back the classic cocktail recipes."

When setting up a home bar, Jackson recommends starting with good bar tools:

- A Boston shaker is a three-component piece used to shake a cocktail
- A citrus press or squeezer is used to press citrus juices into cocktails
- A muddler is used to mash fresh ingredients so as to infuse flavors with alcohol
- A bar spoon is a long spoon, usually about 12 inches, used to stir drinks
- A cutting board with knife is needed to cut fruits or garnishes for drinks
- A jigger is a small measuring cup used for measuring cocktail ingredients

"Those are the basics to get you started," Jackson says.



"And when you buy the spirits to stock your bar, you don't have to break the bank. Pick a brand you like and not one you were told you have to like. The basic anatomy of a cocktail consists of spirits, sugar, bitters, and water. Remember to measure, just as you would when you are cooking, so that the drink isn't too strong or too weak. Good bitters—usually orange and aromatic bitters—bring out layers of flavors. The proportion of water in your drink is 30 percent, shaken or stirred."

The cocktails Jackson suggests all beginning bartenders should master are the Old Fashioned, the classic Martini, the Manhattan, and the Side Car.

"Explore, experiment and enjoy—and be a little daring!" she says, "Our palates change every 5 years, so the drink you once enjoyed may no longer be your favorite."

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Radon: What Lies Below May Harm You,

By Zolton Cohen

In many facets of life being number one is a good thing; an Olympics ski race, automobile sales rankings, the highest grade point average in class. But for nine Michigan counties along the state's southern border, including Kalamazoo, a Zone 1 designation by the Environmental Protection Agency means homes in those counties may suffer from high concentrations of radon gas.

According to the EPA, radon, a colorless and odorless gas found in certain types of soil, is thought to result in 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year nationally - the second leading causative factor for that disease, behind smoking. It is measured in picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L), and numbers found over 4 pCi/L, through testing, are considered actionable for mitigation.

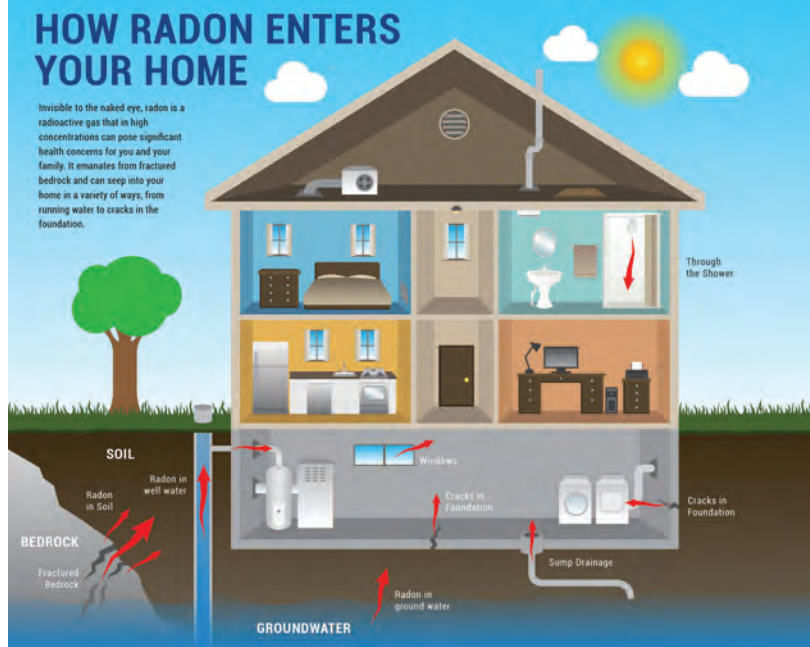
Janis Putelis, owner of Pro-Tek Home Inspections, and a National Environmental Health Association Certified Radon Tech, says that although Kalamazoo County is in Zone 1 the numbers he sees during testing are not as elevated as in other locations in the country. "High for around here might range from 4-5 and maybe up to 10," he says. "Out west, say in Colorado or Montana, their readings might be in the 20's to 40's. Every house is different though, and what your neighbor's home tested has no bearing on what yours will be. It can vary quite a bit. That's why we recommend that every house be tested."

Tim Bunch, certified by the American Society of Home Inspectors and owner of Secure Start Inspections, Inc., has a large map of Kalamazoo County into which he has pushed hundreds of green and red pins over his 18 years of doing radon testing. The green pins represent homes that tested less than 4 pCi/L; the red pins are for homes that tested higher than that. There are clusters of red in some neighborhoods, like Milwood, Eastwood and Westwood. But mostly the red pins are sprinkled here and there, backing up Putelis's statement that homes alongside one another might yield entirely different results.

Bunch says, "Radon can infiltrate a home through cracks in a foundation wall or the joint where the concrete slab meets the foundation wall. Some people think that if they live in or are buying a slab-on-grade house with no basement or crawlspace they don't need to test for or be concerned about radon because they don't have a basement. But the entire floor of that main level is in contact with the soil. So the type of construction doesn't matter as much as what is in the soil under the home. I've had slab-on-grade houses in the Kalamazoo area that have tested at the 6-8 level, which is above the recommended number for mitigation."

Bunch notes that environmental conditions and mechanical systems in the home can have an effect on radon levels, and also on test results. He says, "Whenever you run a bathroom vent fan, exterior-vented range hood or dryer you're putting the house under negative pressure. Where is makeup air going to come from to replace the air that is being blown out of the house? In some cases it's from below the basement slab, and that air can contain radon."

Stormy conditions, atmospheric pressure, wind, and, rarely, sometimes even homeowner sabotage can skew the short term radon test readings that are a necessary part of the



truncated timeframe inherent in a home transaction situation. For better, more accurate data, Bunch recommends longer term tests that can last up to a year and monitor the home through all the seasons.

In the past couple of decades, newer homes in Zone 1 areas have been required by building code to include passive radon mitigation systems that rely on the natural stack effect to evacuate the gas from under the basement slab. But, Bunch says, such homes may not have been tested by the builder, so he recommends an analysis of those dwellings as well. Additionally, he says, "In the real estate industry, that number four is the magic number. The feeling is that if you're at 3.9 you're safe. But that's a misconception. Would you say smoking 2-3 cigarettes a day is safe compared to smoking 15? If your test comes back reading between 2 and 3.9 you may want to think about doing another test, and you may want it to be a long term test because it's going to produce a much more accurate result. If it comes back at 4 or 5 it's always recommended to mitigate. But in that range of 2 to 3.9 it's not a bad idea to test again. If it's below 2 you're probably going to be fine on a long term test."

Peter Kooy, the manager of Michigan Better Environmental, a Kalamazoo-based radon and mold testing business, says the typical cost of installing an active radon mitigation system for a 1,200 square foot vinyl sided home with a concrete basement is around \$700. The price can rise to \$1,300 or so for a larger home, one with a higher radon level, or a more difficult installation situation. Running costs for the fan or fans in an active system can range from \$50-\$100 per year.

Kooy says, "It is impossible to know when walking into a house for the first time the composition of the soil under the basement slab. Every home is different. Compact, dense soils like clay are hard to get suction from using only one suction point compared with more porous, looser, sandy or rocky soils. But if a system doesn't initially reduce the concentration of the gas to a safe level we can add an additional suction point and tie it to the existing fan, or upsize to a larger fan."

Although some passive measures to reduce radon gas infiltration, such as caulking joints in the foundation and slab, can work on a temporary basis, Kooy says they might not be effective in the long term. He says, "Materials expand and contract and caulk joints fail. So those aren't a permanent solution over a long period of time. You're really better off with a system that has been proven to remove the gas and is actively doing so."

Todd Modderman

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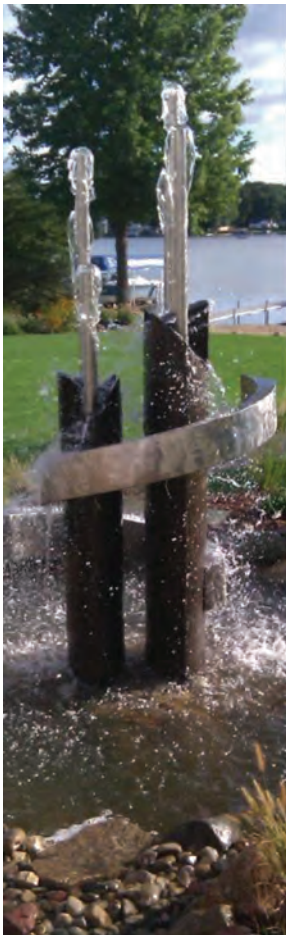
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Pools, Pools, Pools

By Barbara Fisher

Photos Courtesy of Vlietstra Bros. Pools & Spas

The calendar may tell us it's winter, but the pool pros tell us the Michigan pool season is almost upon us and pool installations are being scheduled. If you're thinking this is the year you'd like to relax or entertain around your new pool, it's not too soon to start planning.

As with any large project there is some planning and preparation to do, and it starts with a basic assessment. Is there sufficient space to place a pool? Will the desired location meet setback requirements from property lines, septic fields or wells? Are there buried gas lines or underground cables? Is there a sufficiently sized access point from the street to the backyard for any necessary equipment to fit? Where are your overhead wires? Municipalities vary in terms of their swimming pool requirements, from zoning (or restrictions in plats or associations) to the need for various permits. A call to your local building department and/or zoning administrator is in order.

Now for planning the pool itself. Is an above ground or an inground pool most appealing? What shape and size captures your interest? Josh Vlietstra (Vlietstra Bros. Pools & Spas) notes oblong inground pools run 12 by 24 feet up to 20 by 40 feet. Round above ground pools range from 18 to 30 feet, explains Paul Locey (Locey Swim & Spa Co.) noting the 24 foot size is the national bestseller. Gunitite inground pools (offered by Vlietstra Bros.) are constructed with thousands of pounds of steel and concrete with a finish coat that makes the pool smooth. Both the gunitite and liner constructed inground pools are highly customizable in terms of shape and design. Inground pools built with a liner are offered by Vlietstra Bros. and Roodbergen Pools & Spas. Kay Roodbergen notes one of their liner constructed pools was built with an island in the middle. Locey Pools and Roodbergen Pools both offer the above ground variety. Do you want a diving board? If so, there are safety requirements for the depth of the "diving bowl".

Most pool owners utilize a pool heater in the spring and fall when air temperatures and/or the long winter make for chilly water. Some companies can install radiant heat systems for inground pools. In some instances a safety fence is not needed. Paul Locey explains that above ground pools require a

4 foot barrier and the wall of above ground pools exceed this requirement. Josh Vlietstra notes that the most recent building code allows a certified automatic cover in lieu of a fence for inground pools. "Additionally the cover keeps the pool cleaner, retains heat and reduces the need for chemicals".

So we're excited about the pool and want it in NOW. If NOW is the only consideration, there are pools that require minimum installation time and can be done as a "do-it-yourself" project. Some installations of above ground pools can happen in a day. Right? Who knew? But it's more prudent to look at installation of this type of pool being a 3-4 day installation. Locey notes that 30% of individuals install their own above ground pool with the other 70% electing to use an installer. Locey Pools can help set customers up with an installer; Roodbergen Pools does their own installation. Depending on the type liner, installation for an inground pool will take 3-6 weeks; gunitite pools install in about 8 weeks.

Once your backyard oasis is installed, you'll want to take care of it to keep it healthy. Thankfully the featured pool companies assist their customers in understanding their investment's maintenance requirements. As Kay Roodbergen tells us, "First it's important to understand water chemistry." Keeping the water in balance is not only important for comfort and health, but it will also prolong the life of equipment that comes in contact with the water and aid with the effectiveness of pool chemicals. Water should be tested regularly (this means more than once a week, not once a month). A maintenance routine will include a sanitizer (chlorine or comparable product), an algicide, a product to oxidize contaminants and because water contains minerals, some type of mineral clearing product. Evaporation and heavy rains can impact water chemistry. Kay Roodbergen explained that a busy pool tends to be a cleaner pool, as the "busy" churns up the water which goes thru the filter aiding the water filtration system.

Just like your house, debris will need to be skimmed off the surface of the pool (it's much easier to clean surface debris before it degrades and travels to the bottom of the pool) and pools need to be vacuumed. Vacuuming can be done in the traditional way, manually with a hose and nozzle, or with

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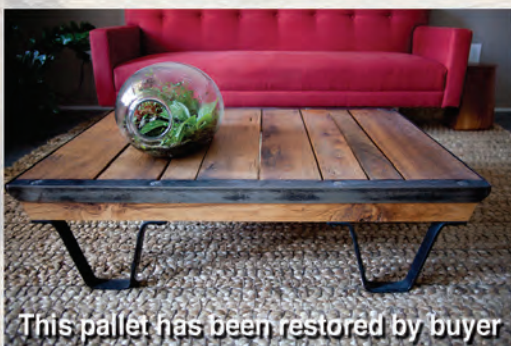
an automatic vacuum, that frankly was so cute it practically begged for a cute name to match! Dave Sluyter (Locey Pools) showed us a model that has a two filter system with a basket that pulls out for easy cleaning and can be managed by your smart phone. You bet there's an app for that! While you're attending to other pressing household business, the vacuum is taking care of the pool. The pool's pump, skimmer baskets, and filters also need to be kept clean and free of debris in order to work effectively. As with most things, once you get the hang of it, pool maintenance becomes routine.

You'll want to keep excess rain or snow melt off pool covers and there's a pump for that. Pools are winterized at the end of the season (this does not mean the pool is drained) and when opened in the spring the pool will need some extra attention.

While the pool pros agree they don't receive orders from individuals stating they want a pool for health reasons, there are various health related benefits. Swimming is great exercise and is especially helpful for persons who require a low impact workout due to arthritis or other conditions. A few laps in the pool stretch and strengthen muscles while providing a low impact aerobic workout. Every kick and arm stroke becomes a resistance exercise (no exercise bands to snap you when they break!)

Locey Swim & Spa Co. specializes in education, pool supplies, chemicals, accessories and stocks above ground pools. Roodbergen Pools & Spas specializes in custom built above ground and inground pools plus carries chemicals and accessories. Vlietstra Bros. Pools & Spas specializes in custom inground pools plus carries chemicals and accessories. All are family owned and operated.

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A Lake Home Where 'Mountain Lodge Meets The Beach'

By Zolton Cohen

Photography Courtesy of Pennings and Sons

In 2006, when Joann and Kevin heard about a house for sale that was near Joann's sister and brother-in-law's place on a peninsula in Gun Lake, they didn't hesitate. She says, "We had been coming to visit them a couple of times a year since 1985 and loved the lake, so we had already been considering buying a home here. They were acquainted with the owners of the house, so before it was even listed Janet sent us some pictures and we purchased it without even coming from where we live in New York."

It was a large house that was originally a summer cottage and had then been added onto over the years, and they made it work for a while. But it also had some intractable issues. "We didn't intend at first to tear it down," Joann says. "But there was no forced air heat or air conditioning, and the lack of insulation and poor windows meant we couldn't get the front room warmer than 55 degrees in the winter." The house also sat low on the lot, which meant the crawlspace was always wet. "When we considered that this is where we are going to retire," Joann says, "it made sense to tear it down and start over."

FINDING A BUILDER, AND DESIGN HELP

Their first step involved finding a builder to make their vision of the new home come to fruition. Joann says, "We started paying attention to homes in the area, and while we were out on our pontoon boat, across the way was a beautiful home we had just seen for the first time. Kevin got in the car and drove over and knocked on the door, and it was the first weekend the new owners had moved in. They were gracious to talk to us about the builder, Pennings and Sons, and we made an appointment to talk to them. Brian Pennings came out to the house, and we liked the fact that they did their own design and their own building, so we decided to go with them."

Brian Pennings, President of Pennings and Sons, displays an easy affection for Joann and Kevin's lake home project. Laughing, he says, "They had this 'mountain lodge meets the beach' concept in their minds, so we had to bring that all together, and the plan developed over time."

Joann and Kevin worked extensively with interior designer Mary Quinn of Legacy Design, and home designer Tami Caperton (the latter via Skype, from Texas where she lives) in order to put a plan in place that would embrace their two



Dark stained 'hand scraped' hickory floors run throughout much of the first floor. The tough surface finish is easy to clean if swimmers happen to inadvertently track in sand from the beach.

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ABOVE: The open floor plan, viewed from the living room, showcases the contrast between the dark wood rail and white balusters along the upper floor walkway, representing the dichotomy between a dark mountain lodge and a light and airy beach house.

BELOW: A ten-foot long dining room table can accommodate up to 12 family members when Joann and Kevin entertain. The sofa table is a favorite spot for Joann to sit with her computer while simultaneously watching TV and the lake.





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differing visions. Joann remembers, "Kevin thought the house should have a lot of dark wood like you'd see in a mountain lodge. I said that's great in the wintertime, but it needs to be bright and light in the summer. We weren't really wedded to those two ideas, but Brian and his team were pretty entertained and amused by it, so they would say to Kevin about some detail, "Is this lodge-y enough for you?"

CONSTRUCTION COMMENCES

After the plans were finalized some significant challenges arose. Pennings says, "It's a relatively narrow lot, and the site conditions posed the biggest issue. The soil was unstable, so we had to drive approximately 50 helical piers 22 feet down in order to get decent bearing. Then we poured a concrete grade beam on top of that. We had done a few remediation projects using helical piers but not on a new home. We hired Kent Concrete to do the work, and it did add substantially to the cost."

He adds, "Any time you work on a lake it seems like access and parking are always a problem, but, fortunately, we had very accommodating neighbors. One in particular, to the north, had a couple of properties they generously allowed us to park on." The teardown took place before Labor Day and was completed in time for the home to be in the annual Parade of Homes the following June. Joann says she was grateful that they didn't lose much summer 'lake time' while construction was underway.

SPACE PLANNING AND DESIGN GO HAND IN HAND

Mary Quinn's name comes up repeatedly in conversation about the designing, building and furnishing of the home. Joann says, "What she did that helped me the most was she would ask me my preferences and then she would bring me just two or three choices instead of going to a design place and looking at a thousand pieces of stone. She would send me pictures and then say, 'are you leaning this way or that way?' and then she would just bring me a few of her best ideas."

Joann says that she and Kevin reused much of their existing furniture from the previous house. Quinn helped to integrate it with new pieces they acquired from local sources. Joann says, "Mary also went with us on appointments to pick out cabinetry, light fixtures, and furniture. We have a big family, so I wanted a ten foot dining table that could accommodate 4 to 12 people. Mary has a great sense of scale and was able to work with our choices."



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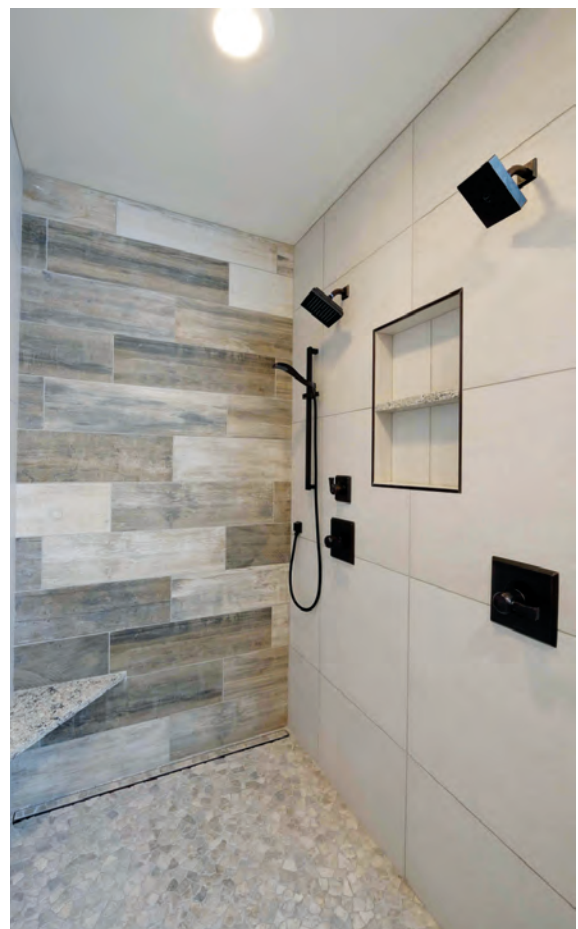
WELCOME HOME



ABOVE: As a retirement present, Joann intends to give Kevin cooking lessons so both can take advantage of all the features and high-end appliances in the spacious and well-equipped kitchen.

BELOW LEFT: The Master Bedroom faces the road, saving the lake views for other rooms.

BELOW RIGHT: The back wall of the large walk-in shower in the master bathroom has porcelain wall tiles that mimic the look of weathered barn siding, while textured mosaic-like floor tiles provide a sure grip underfoot.



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One thing Joann and Kevin insisted on that initially caused a stir with the designers and Pennings was that they wanted the master bedroom to face the road rather than the lake. She says, "When we were first designing I was absolutely sure that that was what I wanted. Brian said he had never built a lakeside house without the master suite on the lake. On the original house the master suite was on the lake, and when there were people on the lake and in the yard, it was difficult to be in our bedroom or bathroom. And we found that there were so many better options for the view."

And there are plenty of those great lake views to be had, in particular from the second floor bedrooms, common area, and second floor porch. There is a second master suite on the upper floor – which Joann and Kevin's three out-of-town kids race to put dibs on when they come to visit on July 4th and other holidays. Joann says, "Our kids love this lake; they grew up on it. My daughter was married at the Bay Pointe Inn. We love lake activities; the kids water ski and wake board, and we all kayak and stand up paddle board."

From the technology that enables them to monitor the home while they're away to the design and craftsmanship of the Pennings crew that they can't help but rave about, Joann and Kevin have built a warm, inviting and practical home that awaits their full-time residence in the near future. She says, "We loved working with the Pennings and loved working with Mary Quinn. Brian and Tami designed the house, and Brad Pennings was the foreman on site. He and his crews were so considerate of us and our neighborhood. If I showed up, it didn't matter what they were doing, Brad instantly gave me 100% of his attention. Their business is very customer-oriented. Despite the fact that we are on a one lane road and they had so much equipment, our neighbors were very understanding; even baking cookies for the crew. And even though Brad was the foreman, he made sure that the road was clean each night before he left."

Pennings says, "Kevin and Joann were a great couple to work with, and were open to a lot of our suggestions. They actively sought out our input into what were the best things to do. We were really able to show our design creativity and also the craftsmanship that we can produce on the job, so it was a very fun project from that standpoint. If we could do one of these homes a year with such accommodating clients it would be wonderful."



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Photo courtesy of Friendship Village

By Zinta Aistars

Good news! A number of recent studies and surveys show that a sense of well-being increases as we near the age of 60 and beyond. As the stresses of establishing our lives, raising families and building careers fall away seniors report a greater enjoyment of life.

As seniors age, our requirements on how we maintain that sense of well-being change, too. Many choose to leave behind previous lifestyles and venture on to new, more relaxed ways of living.

As children grow up and leave the nest, older adults begin to think about downsizing homes, considering a quieter lifestyle, perhaps even joining communities of active seniors in the age group of 55 and above. There are many good reasons to do so—and many options.

COTTAGE LIVING IN A GATED COMMUNITY FOR 55+

A community of brightly colored cottages for active seniors, called Belle Meade (“beautiful meadow”), is springing up in Texas Corners, currently under development by Visser Living, a Southwest Michigan custom home building and remodeling business. With six different floor plans available, ranging from 1,200 square feet on up, each cottage can be customized to the owner’s wishes, with prices beginning at \$350,000.

“We call it cottage living, because these quaint homes all have front porches with garages tucked in back,” says Kelli Scheffers, a broker representing Visser. “They are all connected by sidewalks into a gated community for active, older adults.”

The neighborhood, Scheffers says, is built around connectivity, with the cottages all facing one another. A grassy common space includes a clubhouse, called 1838 for the year that Texas Township was founded, that features a fireplace, a full-service kitchen, a big screen television in a room with comfortable furniture, and space for families and friends to gather. Outdoors a heated pool and pool house with a fire pit invite relaxation.

“It’s a unique setting that has something of a 1920’s character,” Scheffers says. “The bright and vibrant colors of the cottages are quite trendy now and give the neighborhood an artistic and eclectic feel.”

The community will eventually house 48 cottages, with three currently underway and a waiting list of 12 cottages soon to be built. Building, Scheffers says, requires approximately 6 months, depending on the design of the cottage. Each home is landscaped, but that, too, can be customized to the resident’s wishes.

“The grounds will be a part of what makes Belle Meade different,” Scheffers says. “Landscaped but not manicured, with meandering paths and sidewalks. Residents will be within walking or biking distance from local restaurants, the farmers market, parks and shops. It will be a community for people who want to downsize but not compromise. Our goal is to promote people’s autonomy.”

AWARD-WINNING COMMUNITY ON THE EDGE OF TOWN

WeatherStone Village on Marsh Arbor Trail on the east side of Kalamazoo has been family-owned for three generations and over five decades. The gated residential community for seniors aged 55 and above has earned the MHI Land-lease Community of the Year for the Midwest Region.

“Most of our residents have previously owned property within a 15-mile radius of WeatherStone, but are looking to downsize and want a low-maintenance home at this point in their lives,” says Mark McClelland, community manager. “Our homes are factory-built and energy efficient, ranging from 1,500 to 2,000 square feet with two-car garages on poured foundations.”

The process of choosing and building a home to a customer’s designations takes about three months, McClelland says, and the new homeowner can choose colors, materials, and from a variety of two- and three-bedroom floor plans. Prices range from \$100,000 for pre-owned homes to \$200,000 for new structures.

WeatherStone Village is situated on 80 acres that encompass a pond and nature trails that allow for walkers as well as golf carts. Wildlife is abundant, with deer, wild turkey, rabbits, and Sandhill cranes making regular appearances to the delight of residents.

“About one-third of the acreage is currently developed,” McClelland says. “Lots average 7,500 to 10,000 square feet, and we have about 10 lots now available. On average, most of our residents are in their 60s, but many are older as they moved here earlier. It’s a tight-knit community, and we have a clubhouse that’s available for people to gather for events, card games, coffee and potlucks, parties, or whatever residents would like. It’s open 24 hours a day, with a library and pool table for residents to enjoy.”

A CONTINUUM OF CARE WITH A PLAN FOR LIFE

What makes Friendship Village on North Drake Road

a popular choice for seniors is a financing arrangement, called LifeCare®, that assures residents comfortable living arrangements with access to all levels of care, from independent living, to assisted living, to memory care, to skilled nursing.

"Even should you outlive your assets on this plan, you'll never be asked to leave," says Maryl Petrie, director of sales and marketing. "That gives our residents peace of mind."

Residents who are 60 years of age or older and choose independent living have an option to live in either the Village Apartments complex or in a Garden Home.

"We are the only retirement community in Kalamazoo that offers the option to live in your own home," Petrie says. "Our apartments come in 13 floor plans, 300 to 1,200 square feet, studios on up to two bedrooms with two baths. The Garden Homes are stand-alone duplexes with three floor plans, 1,300 to 3,000 square feet. Residents need not worry about maintenance inside or out."

Along with twice monthly housekeeping services, the homes include a garage, utilities and cable, washer and dryer, membership in an on-site fitness center, transportation to medical and financial services in Kalamazoo and Portage, 24-hour security, and many more amenities. Real estate taxes are paid, as the homes are not purchased, but instead financed on a life plan of care.

Situated on 72 acres with paths in wooded areas and residential gardens, active seniors at Friendship Village can enjoy a wide range of activities and cultural events.

"We invite people to come in and learn about our program," Petrie says. "A sales consultant can help you understand what kind of living arrangement will work best for you. You can get on a waiting list and decline however many times you like, until the option you want is available, without penalty."



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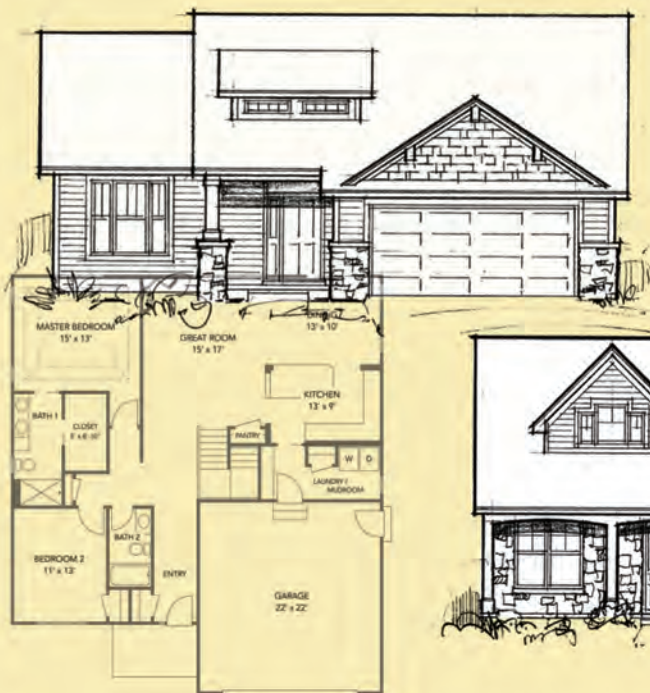
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