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SUMMER 2019



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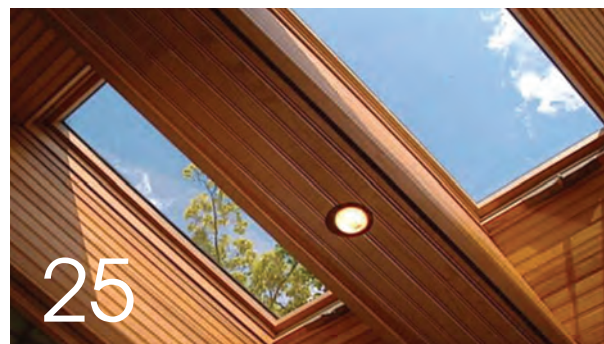
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# It's all about you, *Kalamazoo*

I often have the opportunity to visit the City of Chicago to visit family or for entertainment. While I love this big city and all that it has to offer, especially the food, there is nothing like returning home to Michigan. I grew up in the South Suburbs of Chicago and Northwest Indiana and attended Ball State University and studied Natural Resources Environmental Science. After graduation, I worked for short periods with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and a municipal park system before I had the opportunity to come to Michigan as the Parks Director in St. Joseph County. Once I moved to Michigan, I felt truly at home in this natural state. Living south of Kalamazoo County, the City of Kalamazoo and Portage became part of our neighborhood where we went out to eat, shopped, and found fun things to do. This is why in 2004, I jumped at the opportunity to become the Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo Center Director.

Today, my family and I live in the City of Portage and we truly love all things uniquely Michigan. Searching for morels in the spring, Petoskey Stones or Lake Superior Agates in the summer, picking apples and hunting in the fall, and enjoying the winter snow sports and of course eventually really looking forward to spring!

Working for Kalamazoo County Parks is a dream opportunity to preserve natural resources in our community and provide access for our residents and visitors to these wonderful natural environments. I am often asked which County Park is my favorite, but the truth is that each park offers unique natural and historical features that cannot be compared. From the historic grist mill at Scotts Mill County Park to the remains of the County Poor Farm at River Oaks County Park, you can step back in time at a these County Parks. Enjoying the 2.5 miles of waterfront at Prairie View Park, riding the Maple Hill Mountain Bike Trail at Markin Glen County Park, exploring the trails and nature at River Oaks County Park, or riding a portion of the 22 mile Kalamazoo River Valley Trail are just a few of the natural experiences located just minutes from your front door.

Coming to Kalamazoo also gave me the opportunity to work with the 200+ events held at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center. Almost every weekend the Expo Center is transformed into a unique event. From dog shows, living history shows, collectible shows, or consumer expos, there is something for everyone.

In addition to loving Michigan, the greatest part of our community is the people that live and work here. The Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo Staff work every day to provide outstanding services for our residents and visitors.

There is also just something friendly about the people in Kalamazoo. With summer just underway, I welcome everyone to come out and explore the wonderful Kalamazoo County Parks and the many unique events at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center.

*David Rachowicz*  
Director  
Kalamazoo County Parks  
and Expo Center





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# Sweet Celebrations

## Baby Ruth Bars

Photography and recipe by Linda Hoard

I like to say these are healthy! After all, they have oatmeal, peanut butter and honey in them. And they're gluten free if you use gluten free oatmeal! These are the perfect treat to take to a picnic, potluck or just need to make something quick when you're having a sugar craving. This is my go-to for any family get-together. The frosting is so good that I actually doubled the recipe. And, well, if you're like some of the chocoholics in my family, you might make just the frosting and eat it straight out of the pan!

### Bars:

2 sticks butter (1 cup)  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
1/2 cup honey  
1/3 cup crunchy peanut butter  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
5 cups quick oats

Preheat oven to 350.

Beat butter until soft and creamy, then beat in brown sugar, honey, crunchy peanut butter and vanilla extract. Add the quick oats and mix just until blended.

Spread into a 9x13 pan and bake for 20-25 minutes. Do not overbake. They are best when the edges are just starting to brown and the center is still a little soft.

### Frosting:

2 cups chocolate chips (or a 12 oz bag)  
2 cups butterscotch chips (or a 12 oz bag)  
1 1/3 cups crunchy peanut butter

Melt the chips in a double boiler, or if you're brave, on very low heat in a saucepan. Watch very carefully! (I've burned many batches of this and had to run to the store for more chocolate and butterscotch chips!) When chips are almost melted, stir in the peanut butter.

Spread over the cooled bars (unless you just can't wait...then spread it over the warm bars!)

If I'm in a hurry, I like to put it in the refrigerator for a few minutes to firm up the frosting, but I feel it's better if you can wait until the frosting firms up a bit on its own.



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## Make Your House Work for You

By Brittany Tomaselli

In the last few years we've seen a surge in home automation systems. Thanks to popular DIY systems such as Amazon's Alexa, we no longer view smart homes as belonging in a sci-fi world—they have become current and accessible features that are available to all homeowners. If you don't already own some sort of home automation feature, then you definitely know someone who does. The DIY systems on the market might be more visible to the average consumer, however the real strides in this field are being made by professional technology integrators. Beyond flashy and giving your home that wow-factor to impress guests, a home automation system can lend value to your home as well as positively impact your life in ways you've never imagined.

### WHY AUTOMATE YOUR HOME?

Have you ever really thought about the amount of time we spend a day performing menial tasks, such as making sure all the lights are turned off? Those minutes add up, minutes that could be spent sharing a special moment with your child or laughing with your friends. In the show-home of Troy Cuvelier from Integrated Smart Technologies, you can experience what it would be like if these tasks were eliminated. "It's all about efficiency, finding the places to make time more valuable with your family or your friends instead of wasting it," says Troy. Imagine how much more easy and fun entertaining or cooking for your family could be if your kitchen acted as your personal assistant. The ability to enjoy and use each moment to the fullest is at the core of what these home automation technologies are working to accomplish. Almost any device works without you having to physically do anything. The lighting, entertainment systems, security systems, the blinds, temperature controls—all of it can be controlled with voice command or from an interface such as phone, tablet, and wall mounted touch screen. The efficiency of these systems can be

especially beneficial for seniors who want to stay in their home as long as possible. Automated raising platforms in the kitchen allow for heavy appliances to be raised to the counter without having to lift them. Additionally, features such as sensors beneath the bed that detect when you get up at night and activate dim lighting to help guide you, can help prevent debilitating falls.

The technology of home automation has also become significantly more intelligent, even in the last few years. Beyond just switching devices on and off, the artificial intelligence now allows you to customize. For example, you can set the lighting in an area to 25% brightness or ask your TV play Episode 3 from Season 2 of "Stranger Things". And in recent years, some of this technology has been created to simply react to your personal schedule. As Troy says, "Artificial intelligence and voice control has really been the biggest change that we've seen." Through the use of sensors, motion sensors, and pressure sensors, technology has "the ability to have the house work around you...it knows what time of day it is, what time of year, if your home is armed to away or stay." The shades in the bedroom, for example, knows what season it is, what time the sun will rise as well as other variables that affect when it should let in the sunlight. Imagine easing into your day as the shades rise and music begins to softly play. Even the salt water pool has the ability to track its own pH levels and dispense salt accordingly. The lights, jets, and temperature of the pool can all be controlled from the home. The goal, as Troy notes, is to create an environment that adapts to you and your schedule without having to run around pushing knobs or buttons.

### DIY OR PROFESSIONALLY INSTALLED?

There are certainly a variety of DIY systems available on the market. These basic solutions don't usually require you to run many wires, they operate off of your Wi-Fi, and are





generally (at least advertised as) simple to install. Many stores do offer technical assistance, however the time and know-how required to properly set up a working home automation system is not something most people have. As Troy says, "You can choose to do what you're good at. For most people it's their day job, spending time with family, or their hobbies--not beating their head against the wall for hours trying to figure out how to connect their lights to their phone." It's easy to run into technical difficulties during installation, or at any point during the system's operation for that matter. It very well may end up saving you money to hire a professional if you incorrectly install your own system and have to pay money to fix it. Even if you are fairly tech savvy, every system will need a reboot at one point, and when that happens you're going to wish you had a professional to assist you.

In addition to saving time and money, it's important to take into account the forward compatibility of your system. When working with a professional home technology integrator, they will not only be able to discuss options based on your needs, but they will make sure your system will be updatable as technology progresses. When you buy a DIY product, there is no real guarantee it will be compatible with the next big upgrade. At the increasingly rapid rate that technology is changing, having a high level of expandability is key for the longevity and effectiveness of your system. Additionally when you use devices from competing manufacturers, you might end up dealing with annoying "app clutter"-- which refers to the number of applications needed to access your devices. You might have one app for your security system, another one for your Google Home, and yet another one for your thermostat. When you have a professionally installed system, however, everything is integrated into one platform and one simple intuitive app that automatically gives you access to all your devices.

You also might want to consider the level of security required for home automation. In cases where smart homes are

hacked, they are usually DIY systems where the owner didn't understand the level of complexity needed to safeguard their network. In these cases, the device is simply connected to a person's Wi-Fi, and if their Wi-Fi is easy to gain access to (usually as a result of poor security passwords), then usually their other devices will also be easy to access. Professionally installed systems not only use specialized software, but they also use multiple levels of data encryption that would need to be bypassed. With a professionally installed system, you have a team of experts making sure that everything is secure.







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# Choosing the Right Barrier for Your Property

By Brittany Tomaselli

**T**he most important question to ask yourself when choosing an enclosure or barrier for your yard is--what is the primary purpose it will serve? Safety, privacy, and property delineation are common objectives for property barriers. Barrier types such as traditional fences will help you cover several of these bases while more specialized barriers like automatic pool covers excel at one or two specific purposes. Keeping in mind exactly what result you want your fence to achieve will be a key factor in deciding what sort of barrier will serve your property best.

## TRADITIONAL FENCES

Physical fences are the most popular and long-established type of barrier for your property. Not only do they provide a material boundary for your yard, they can also provide safety and privacy. Additionally, they are the only barrier option that can increase the aesthetic appeal to your home. Ben Yost of Farm and Garden Fencing explains, "A fence can add a lot of real value to your home." It is a permanent feature, much like a deck, that will increase your home's actual worth. There are also a wide variety of building material options for fencing, all of which have different price points and achieve different purposes better than others. For example, wood fences are usually moderately priced and great for achieving privacy. When installed by a professional fence builder, it guarantees added aesthetic value. Vinyl can be a little more expensive than wood, but has less maintenance involved. It's a good choice if you are looking for a decorative fence that can also provide privacy. Metal fences like aluminum and iron, on the other hand, also involve little maintenance, but are less able to provide privacy. They do, however, look striking, and are a hardy option that can withstand a lot of wear and tear. One thing to keep in mind if you are going to install a physical fence is the effect it will have on your neighbors. Discussing your

fence plans with those whose property it will affect is always wise. Not only does this prevent resentment between neighbors, but it's also possible that if you decide on a fence that is mutually beneficial, your neighbor might be willing to chip in on some of the costs.

Once you've decided the direction you want to go, make sure you choose the right professionals to install your fence. "Fence building is an underrated craft," says Ben. There's a lot that goes into making a fence look beautiful. The amount of experience a professional has in both assessing the best designs for any given property and in skillfully implementing them is indispensable. Fence installers have had the practice necessary to build a fence that is both beautifully crafted and properly set. They will also be the most knowledgeable about geography specific factors and municipal ordinances--both important considerations that could limit both the type of materials you can use and the variety of fence you can build. When it comes to residential fencing, there is "an increasing demand for service, knowledge, and skill," says Ben. The quality of your fence will have a huge impact on how much value it adds to your home. Besides the additional home value, having a fence installed is often the best choice for you if your concerns include privacy and ornamentation.

## AUTOMATIC POOL COVERS

If one of the purposes of installing a fence is because you have a pool or are considering one, purchasing an automatic pool cover instead of a fence might be a viable and beneficial option for your property. As Josh Vlietstra of Vlietstra Brothers Pools explains, there are actually less regulations for using an automatic pool cover as your pool's safety barrier than there are for fences. Installing a "fence around a pool is very particular ...it has to be four feet, the gates have to be self closing and self-latching, open outward." Automatic pool covers, on the





other hand, are already safety compliant as a matter of course. They are solid barriers that completely cover your pool, seal on all four sides, and are able to bear the weight of multiple adults—making them virtually impenetrable. Not only do they provide a sense of safety, they also keep debris out of your pool, making cleaning and upkeep a bit easier. “They hold in heat, hold in moisture so evaporation is knocked down,” Josh says, “You’re also saving a little bit on chemicals.” Additionally if you use an automatic pool cover instead of a fence, there won’t be anything obstructing your view and you’ll be able to enjoy scenery while in the water. Automatic pool covers are an excellent option if you are looking for a convenient safety barrier for your pool. They can also be used in tandem with other types of fencing if you are looking to also have privacy and additional safety.

#### OTHER BARRIER OPTIONS

There are also a couple alternative options you may want to consider. If you are looking for an enclosure for your pets that doesn’t require a structure, invisible fences may be an option for you. They are an excellent way to keep pets on your property and are generally much less expensive than putting up a fence—especially if you have a large amount of property. However, it’s best to keep in mind that they will not keep other animals or people out. Another barrier option that doesn’t require building a structure are “living fences.” A living fence is a natural boundary made from trees, bushes, or hedges. These may take awhile to grow in, but once established, they can be an inexpensive option for delineating property lines. Deer also often tend to respect hedges and other living boundaries, so it might be a viable solution for keeping deer out. Additionally, a few living fences, such as hedges, may be able to provide more privacy than some varieties of traditional fencing.

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# THE HOUSE BETWEEN

By Zinta Aistars  
Feature Photography by Jim Schuon

She lives with the kids in Arlington Heights, outside of Chicago. He lives in Detroit in an apartment. They meet on weekends.

IT MADE PERFECT SENSE TO BUILD A HOUSE BETWEEN

"We have an older son, but our two daughters are still in high school, so I stayed here while David went to Detroit for work," says Laura Ladd.

"Living on the west side of Michigan has always been a dream," David Ladd says. "I am originally from Detroit, went to Chicago for work, but now I've been back in Detroit for about three years. Laura and I have been driving around the South Haven area for about a year, looking for a lot to build."

They found it. The perfect lot for their house between was in a gated community called Windcliff Shores near South Haven.

"We loved the lot as soon as we found it," Laura smiles. "There are trees for privacy, and as you walk down the street, an expanse of Lake Michigan opens up with a private beach for the community at the end, along with a community pool."

Their own little slice of heaven found, the Ladds began to look for an architect and a builder to make their dream come true. Laura is a fan of the Pinterest site online, a place to collect and "pin" various ideas of interest.

"I called it my Cottage Board," she says. "I collected a year's worth of photos and ideas, and we realized that we kept going back again and again to a certain style—a farmhouse-style house with a wraparound porch, white with black shutters. So we began to search for architects in the South Haven area, and we found Marla Bruemmer."

David also asked neighbors in their new neighborhood for references, and Bruemmer's name came up several times, highly recommended.















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The Ladds set up a meeting with Marla Bruemmer of Design Evolutions, a business she established in 1998, designing custom homes in Kalamazoo, South Haven, and South Bend. With a family history in construction, Bruemmer received her degree in residential design and construction management and engineering from Western Michigan University.

"Form follows function," Bruemmer says. "Our first meeting, I sit down with homeowners to do a verbal walk-through of their house. We talk about how they plan on using the house, how they envision it when finished. My next step is to go out and walk the property, see the views so that I can design the windows for those."

As plans began to take shape, the Ladds saw their 2,800-square-foot farmhouse-style home come to life. They requested four bedrooms with four baths, a bonus room over the garage that would serve both as a family getaway or a guest room. They wanted that wraparound porch and a large patio in back of the house with a fire pit for those long, lazy Saturday evenings when the family gathers to relax.

"And the kitchen," Laura says. "The kitchen is my favorite room. It's the heart of the home."

Bruemmer's drawings in hand, the Ladds sought a builder to transform drawings into reality. Paying attention to signs alongside new construction they liked, they noticed one name in particular: Beyer Construction. It was the same name they saw on a list of several builders Bruemmer recommended.

"We had no idea that Marla was married to Jim Beyer," Laura laughs.

#### SERENDIPITY.

Jim Beyer of Beyer Construction is a certified green professional builder, 43 years in the business. The former Home

Builders Association president often works with his wife's designs, but also many others. He began work on the Ladd home in September 2018 and finished this spring.

"We built the Ladd house green, because that's how I've been building long before anyone was even thinking about green," Beyer says. "These days, the industry has been forced to go that way, but we've been recycling materials all along. We don't fill the dumpsters."

With so many building materials, including cabinetry, appliances, and windows packaged in cardboard, Beyer Construction flattens all cardboard and recycles it, on average filling two pick-up truck loads with cardboard alone. All scrap is reused.

"We also use Superior Insulated Walls," Beyer says. "We've used them for 13 years, and they make the warmest, driest basements you'll find anywhere, up to R30."

Beyer Construction focuses on energy efficiency, natural and non-toxic materials, ventilation systems to control moisture and air flow, and building in a position that follows the path of the sun.

"Many homeowners today like the open concept," Beyer says. "We have to get creative with that, because eliminating walls means we have to find places to put plumbing, electrical. Sometimes we go up one wall and down another, use a fake beam to hide a pipe, or put it in a corner of a closet."

For the Ladd home, the biggest challenge was bringing in a granite countertop for the 10' by 5' island in the center of the kitchen.

"WE HAD SIX GUYS CARRYING THAT IN," BEYER SAYS.

"I didn't want a sink in the middle of it," Laura says. "I wanted it to be a place for people to gather, maybe have a buffet, with five stools around it."



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With the homeowners in two different places and the designer and builder in a third, modern technology became the best option for communication. Photos traveled over text to keep everyone updated, and texts quickly settled options as the build progressed.

"Now we are preparing for landscaping," David says. "We've completed a design and are down to choosing one of two."

The Ladd family now spends their weekends in their new home, enjoying the cool lake breezes from their patio. They are enjoying decorating their new space with the help of Scott Shuptrine Interiors.

"You know that Pure Michigan sign you see when you enter the state?" David says. "We really feel that now. You can feel your blood pressure drop as you get closer to home."

"It's a calm feeling," Laura says. "The entire building experience has been seamless. It's important to know what you want when you go into something like this. Take that year to gather ideas, see what keeps drawing you in before you meet with a designer and builder."

What draws you in and holds you, the Ladds say, is what makes a house a home.

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