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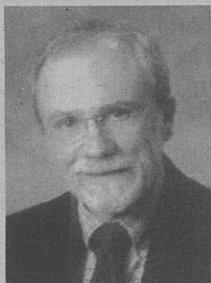
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OUT in the MOUNTAINS

Contractor's-Eye View

BY APRIL VILLEMAIRE

I don't often get a chance to talk about what my job is like. I am a building contractor. I have been doing carpentry work for approximately 27 years. I started out when I was 16 remodeling our basement. My Dad lost a leg in WW2 so I grew up doing a lot of things that my Dad knew how to do but wasn't able. I love carpentry. I love the smell of wood on my clothes at the end of the day; it is such a natural smell, not overwhelmed with all the chemicals of most of today's day to day things.

I have done this kind of work off and on most of my life. I took a job in Connecticut at Pratt & Whitney at age 20 and took a tool and die school they offered. I always felt so closed in, so trapped by the confines of the physical aspect of commercial buildings and the bureaucracy of a many-layered management.

After leaving construction for a few years I got laid off from my last job. I really didn't mind, as the call of owning my own business kept eating at me. I had run a business before, and since then letting others control your income and destiny never appealed to me much. People say they can't give up the security, but after two layoffs I wasn't really feeling too secure about employment.

Last May, I opened a business called April's Home Improvement, Inc. I started out with the essentials: a few hand tools and power tools and a ladder. The beauty of construction is your ability is more about your skills than the fancy tools you have. I know a few carpenters that have big fancy trucks and carry around a hardware store. All those tools and I wouldn't let them build me a doghouse. There are many wonderful skilled carpenters in Vermont, but there are as many who are in between jobs looking for a way to

make a buck who's experience and skill level is a bit below what I would care to have working on my home.

I think an important part of this focus should be what to look for in a good contractor, whether a carpenter, electrician, plumber or otherwise. Always ask for references, and never call from the top down because you know those on top are the ones that will give the best referral. Always ask for proof of insurance, your contractor should have one or easily get a copy of his certificate faxed.

My grandmother hired a carpenter to redo her kitchen while

themselves in an appealing way doesn't mean you are going to get a good job done.

I have been fortunate to learn my craft from the "old timers." They did it all and learned all they could to get promoted to the next skill level. Construction these days is different. Many contractors specialize in siding, windows, doors, roofing – that is, in one particular aspect of construction – and their employees are not so broadly trained. Find out about the background of those you hire. It's your home and hard earned money you trust them with.

Ask for any certifications; find out if they are always trying to improve their skills. I try to go to at least one class a year, whether it be lead paint, disability access or new products on the market. When you stop trying to improve your skills you stop being the best you can be. We all have

Make sure the contractor you hire will walk away giving you what you deserve for your money and will back their work if any problems do arise.

I was living in Colorado. She called me crying one day when I was home visiting and what I saw was awful. This person threw together basically plywood boxes and a plywood counter top. The faucets were leaking underneath and it wasn't even painted. I asked her when he was coming back to finish, thinking maybe he was going to laminate the wood with a pretty wood and the counter was just temporary. He wasn't coming back – he was all done. I called him and asked when he would return; he told me that is what she wanted and he was finished with the job. I did redo her kitchen and tried to get her money back, but the guy had neither insurance nor assets. Other than being reported to the better biz bureau he got away with it. My point is, just because they are the cheapest or present

more to learn, will make mistakes, but make sure the contractor you hire will walk away giving you what you deserve for your money and back their work for any problems that do arise. I rarely get call backs but they happen.

It's always a pleasure for me to prove to a customer that I stand behind my work. Making them happy should be a big part of why you are there. Do your homework, and know there are many wonderful contractors in your area waiting to help you fulfill your dreams on your home. ▼

April Villemaire is the founder and president of April's Home Improvement.