



DO IT YOURSELF RESOURCES FEATURE: Patricia Griffin

Patricia Griffin's journey, from receiving a cancer diagnosis to being honored with the 2024 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration award, is truly remarkable. Amidst battling cancer, she embarked on the daunting task of revitalizing her 1910s-era home from a neglected state to one ready for occupancy, displaying her resilience, determination, and grit.

The journey began with the jolting cancer diagnosis in November 2022, which turned Patricia's world upside down. While still in the hospital, Patricia, and her husband, Lankeu, were confronted not only with numerous decisions regarding her treatment but also the choice of proceeding with their planned home purchase. "We were not going to give up. We ended up closing on the house before I was even released from the hospital," Patricia recounted.

Despite undergoing intensive treatment, including eight rounds of chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant, Patricia threw herself into the home renovation project, tackling everything from adding insulation to empty walls to reglazing countless old windows to

addressing black mold issues. In reflecting on that period, Patricia noted, "We were driven to have the home ready for occupancy by the time our lease expired on the house we were renting. With only 90 days and with my treatment schedule, we had no option but to persevere. We could not have done this without a ton of support from family, friends, and our church community. Surprisingly, I found solace in keeping my hands occupied in between treatments."

For the kitchen renovation, Patricia sought assistance from Home Repair Services, collaborating closely with Mike Zamarron, the Self-Help Program Manager, to design a space that not only met her needs but also complemented the home's original woodwork and character. The final design creatively maximized storage space while concealing the kitchen sink and dishwasher from the dining room view.

Patricia's introduction to Home Repair Services was quite providential. She explained, "The church we attend is on Division Avenue and one day, I happened to

notice the HRS sign was advertising a free repair workshop. I immediately visited the website to learn more and began attending regularly on Saturdays. I have taken so many classes that I have lost count. Not only did I gain valuable knowledge each time, but the staff's warmth made me feel like I was making friends."

Like all the 2024 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration finalists, Patricia opted for the cabinets crafted by volunteers in the HRS Cabinet Shop. She chose oak frames and doors, meticulously selecting a stain that would match the original hardwood trim throughout the home. Patricia and her mother spent countless hours at HRS applying the stain and final finishes. The effort paid off significantly, as Patricia remarked, "The savings from the HRS cabinets over a quote from a big box store was incredible. With the cabinet savings, I was able to add solid surface quartz countertops!"

Patricia's determination can be traced back to her upbringing on a farm in *continued on page 3*

2024 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration

Event Highlights

- Held at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park with record attendance
- Honored Allyson Terpsma and Steve Sielaff as the 2024 Abe DeVries honored volunteers
- Celebrated the incredible home improvement work and resourcefulness of Alex & Allison Brito, Felicia Chinn, Patricia Griffin, and Greg & Elizabeth Salgado

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Thank you to our Award Selection Committee

Lynn Afendoulis – UFP Industries
Tasha Cruz – DeVos Family Foundation
Max Friar – Calder Capital
Bob Johnson – Retired JDH Structural Engineering
Les Morant – Morant Law PLLC
Ginger Randall – Retired Grand Valley State University
Sue Teitsma – David & Carol Van Andel Family Foundation
Lindsey Tilley – Amway



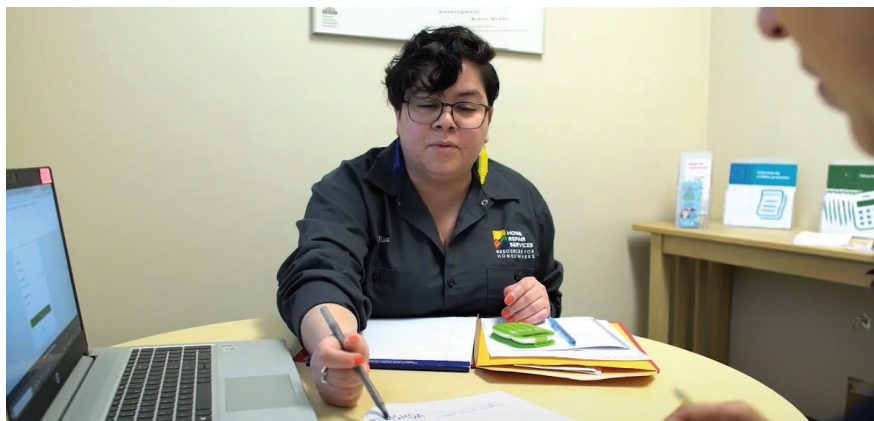
Housing Counselors Deliver State Funding for Clients

"When you add a new service for clients, you hope it is going to make a difference, but then you wait and see. In looking back at our decision to assist clients with applying for MIHAF support, it was clearly needed and we are overjoyed with the success rate," said Joel Ruiter, Executive Director of Home Repair Services, as he reflected on the recently concluded program. The Michigan Homeowner Assistance Fund (MIHAF) was established to provide "catch up" funds for Michiganders who experienced economic hardship directly tied to the COVID19 pandemic. But to be considered, applicants needed to file online and upload support documents.

In recalling the decision to get involved, Alisa Flores, Housing Counseling & Financial Education Manager, shared, "Programs like MIHAF can be a great resource for families in need, but often there are unintended barriers like reading comprehension, language, and access to technology, which prevent the funds from reaching the targeted recipients. We thought if we got involved, more fully completed applications from local residents would make it to the decision makers at the state level."

Starting in February 2022 through early December of 2023, the two HRS counselors assisted 65 clients in making a complete MIHAF application, and when the program ended, 44 of those applicants were approved, bringing nearly \$300,000 in desperately needed catch up funds to those households. Amber Jones, a HRS Housing Counselor, commented, "It was extremely rewarding to have such a high success rate. The funds provided much needed relief, assisting with missed mortgage payments, back property taxes, and utility bills in some cases."

While the funding proved critical, an added benefit for 35 of the 65 applicants was their desire to take advantage of the HRS counselors' offer for one-on-one counseling sessions. "These clients asked us to review their household budgets, discuss spending plans, and explore ways to save more money. It was gratifying to help them catch up and to strategize ways to keep them on track," said Alisa Flores. "Now that the program is ended, we are hopeful the state will consider a replacement program for other vulnerable citizens. And if so, we will be ready to serve."



Popular Financial Education Event Returns



Home Repair Services will once again serve as host for Show Me the Money Day. This special event showcases our financial education program and offers FREE breakout workshops on topics like budgeting, credit, identity theft, asset and wealth building, debt management, homebuying, starting a business, and more. It will take place in the HRS lobby on **Saturday, May 18 from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm**. Guests will enjoy coffee and pastries, a delicious lunch, vendor fair, and several raffled door prizes. It is free and open to the public and five of the workshop sessions will be taught in Spanish. Come join us!

Griffin – continued from page 1

Kalamazoo County, instilling in her both a strong work ethic and a curiosity for understanding how things function. That grit and curiosity eventually took her to the University of Michigan, where she studied engineering, and after school, to Kenya, a place far from her Michigan roots. It was there she met her husband, Lankeu. "I moved to Kenya not knowing a soul so I quickly joined a church to help meet people. We met at a volunteer event. When we started our family {the family includes 5-year-old son, Toviel} we moved to the U.S. and eventually landed here in Grand Rapids."

As Patricia stood on stage accepting the 2024 Resourceful Homeowner Celebration award, her heart swelled with pride as tears filled her eyes. And on a night filled with many joyous ovations, the loudest round of applause came when she announced that her cancer is in remission. Patricia's journey has been a testament to the power of resilience, creativity, and community, proving that with enough faith and determination, what seems improbable can become possible.



Mother & Daughter Staining Duo



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Repair Team Helps Couple in Their Moment(s) of Need

Mark and Sandy Thrush have greatly enjoyed their retirement years thus far, reveling in the newfound freedom that comes from no longer having to adhere to a strict work schedule. They have also found contentment residing in the attractive and comfortable manufactured home they purchased in 2018. However, retirement also necessitates adjustments, including grappling with the realities of living on a fixed income and adjusting to the health changes that come with aging.

Over the past 18 months, Mark (75) and Sandy (71) have encountered both of these realities. Some declines in their mobility prompted the need for exploration of safer access to and from their home, and more recently, they had the dreaded experience of having their furnace conk out and learning it needed to be replaced. Thankfully, Home Repair Services was able to step in and provide them with the assistance they needed, ensuring their living conditions remained safe while keeping their household budget on track.

Reflecting on their experiences, Sandy shared, “Our first encounter with Home Repair Services was when we needed safer steps. It was bad. We both had fallen several times using the old steps. John from HRS came out and told us we didn’t have room enough for a ramp but he thought they could build ‘walker steps’ instead. We said yes on the spot!” The term “walker steps” refers to specially designed stairs with large step depths intended to accommodate individuals using walker mobility devices. This innovative solution not only enhances homeowner safety but they require less space to construct and much less material than a traditional access ramp. Sandy added, “The new steps have been such a blessing. I like to walk around the park with my walker for exercise and it is so much easier now to get in and out of the home. And no more falls!”

“In March, our furnace was not running right so I placed a call to Home Repair Services to see if it could be looked at,” Sandy recalled. Her call to the HRS intake desk soon led to a service technician from Pro-Tech Heating & Cooling coming to their home to assess the situation. Unfortunately, the diagnosis was grim—the 26-year-old furnace had a crack in the heat exchanger creating risk for carbon monoxide exposure. It needed to be shut down on the spot. Fortunately, through wonderful partnerships with DTE Energy and the Kent County Senior Millage, Home Repair Services was able to react quickly and see to it that a new furnace was installed for Mark and Sandy.

“We are incredibly pleased with how everything went with both the furnace and the steps. Everyone at HRS who has worked on our behalf has been so diligent, kind, and caring. We are so grateful that there is Home Repair Services in our community!”



LAST PROGRAM YEAR...

**HRS CONSTRUCTED
45 ACCESS RAMPS
AND 5 WALKER STEPS**

**AND RESPONDED TO
294 FURNACE OUTAGES
INCLUDING 101 NEW FURNACES.**

PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: DINA ROWLAND

Dina Rowland, a carpenter on the HRS Repair Program team, discovered her passion for woodworking and home improvement at an early age. Reflecting on her childhood, she recalls, "Even as a girl playing with my Barbie's Dreamhouse, I couldn't stand the fact the plastic and cardboard windows would not open. So, armed with a steak knife from my mom, I made my first home improvement." As she progressed through high school at a time when traditional gender roles in classes like wood shop versus home economics were just beginning to shift, Dina found herself gravitating towards the power tools of shop class. "I was a disaster in Home Economics, but in Shop class, I felt right at home."

However, despite the changing attitudes in education, opportunities for female carpenters in the construction trades were scarce after Dina graduated. "I tried to find jobs, but no one was willing to hire a woman," she recalls. It was during her time cleaning homes and performing small plumbing repairs that she realized her potential. "I thought to myself, 'I should be getting paid to do this.'"

Dina then established her own handy-person business where she honed her repair skills while seeking advice wherever she could find it, including her clients. "Some might be afraid to ask a client for their thoughts but I have never felt that way. I learned a lot during those years."

Her introduction to Home Repair Services came through a workshop on building sheds that had been advertised in a local weekly newspaper. "I attended with my dad, looking for something to help keep him busy and I was amazed by what I saw. I started volunteering as workshop instructor and did so for 12 years before joining as a carpenter in 2014."

Over the past decade, Dina has developed an expertise in modifying bathrooms – often for seniors – by removing high rimmed bathtubs and installing low-threshold shower stalls. Her clients frequently express gratitude for her caring and meticulous approach to each project. Additionally, Dina continues to share her knowledge as a teacher in the HRS Fix-It School – and especially loves leading the monthly Women's Only offerings where she imparts equal parts knowledge and encouragement. "I just love what I do. We have the opportunity to help so many people who need us."

Thank you, Dina, for your invaluable contributions through the years and for positively impacting our community.



The Wege Foundation Helps Transform HRS Vehicle Fleet

With generous funding from the Wege Foundation, Home Repair Services recently added two all-electric cargo vans to its fleet. These new vans replace a 20-year-old van and an 18-year-old pickup truck both running on gasoline. In addition to environmental benefits, the transition to electric vehicles brings several advantages, including reduced energy consumption, lower annual maintenance costs, and the adaptability of their cargo spaces.

"Our service technicians have seamlessly transitioned to the new vans," remarked Michael Guis, HRS Repair Team Manager. "They offer more space for storage and with higher ceilings, our techs can stand inside at a workbench. It allows them to cut materials or pre-assemble items before ever entering a client's home. We now have three electric vehicles in operation and we couldn't be happier!"

Home Repair Services extends its sincere gratitude to the Wege Foundation for its incredibly generous support.



If you would like to learn more about **supporting the work of HRS**, contact Director of Development, Steven Nicolet, at (616) 241-2601 ext. 223 or snicolet@homerepairservices.org

news from HOME



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Join Us For a Lunch & Learn Tour

Home Repair Services continues to host monthly Lunch & Learn events in our building located at 1100 S. Division in Grand Rapids. We invite you to join us for a behind the scenes look at how HRS touches the lives of thousands of Kent County neighbors each year. We look forward to inviting you into our home, sharing with you how we strengthen housing structures and strengthen the people living in them, and answering your questions about HRS. The event is from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm with a tasty box lunch provided. If you have a few extra minutes, feel free to stay for a tour of our converted 1940's era auto dealership. Whether you are new to HRS or have been a longtime friend, please be our guest.

To reserve your seat at a future Lunch & Learn, go to:
homerepairservices.org/lunch-and-learn-tour/



Upcoming 2024 Lunch & Learn Dates

Friday, May 17	Friday, August 16	Friday, November 15
Friday, June 21	Friday, September 20	Friday, December 20
Friday, July 19	Friday, October 18	

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