

Builders Organize Online to Build Ramps

A group of builders participating in an online forum have each pledged to build at least one wheelchair ramp this year — free of charge — for a person who needs one but may not otherwise have the resources to pay for one. They're calling their effort a "Ramp-a-Thon" and recently set up a Web site (ramp-a-thon.com) to track their progress and share detailed information about building ramps. The group's goal is to build 30 ramps in 2009; the first to complete a ramp was Dale Kirby of Kirby Custom Homes in Ohio, in February.

The initiator of the online Ramp-a-Thon is Mac MacDonald, owner of Built By Mac in Eugene, Ore. He was inspired by a Ramp-a-Thon he participated in last year that was sponsored by his local home building association, the HBA of Lane County (hbalane-county.org). In that event, he built two ramps, one for a man who'd lost his leg in a forklift accident, and the other for an 11-year-old boy with muscular dystrophy. "Mobility is a huge thing that most of us take for granted," MacDonald says. "Giving someone the freedom to get out their front door is priceless."

To share his enthusiasm and inspire others to help someone in need,

MacDonald posted photos of his ramps on the decking and fencing forum at Contractor.com and challenged other forum participants to do something similar in their own communities, whether through their builder's association or a local charity, or on their own. More than 20 forum users responded, including one who offered to set up the Web site for the group.

On the Ramp-a-Thon Web site, MacDonald provides some suggestions for how to get started, based on his own experience with the HBA of Lane County. In that case, MacDonald says, a small committee was formed with a number of principal players, including the builders who would be the "ramp captains." One of the other committee members worked for a local humanitarian agency and knew of several people who needed wheelchair ramps. The committee sent each of the potential ramp recipients an application, and from the applications that were returned, selected five.

The ramp captains met with the future ramp owners, checked out the sites, compiled material lists, and contacted local lumberyards to donate (or reduce their prices on) the materials. The yard guys at MacDonald's regu-

lar supplier, for example, scrounged through the twisted pile and came up with usable 4-foot chunks of 2x4s, 2x6s, and 2x8s. The plywood for all the ramps was purchased at a discount from a distributor in Portland, Ore., which in turn received a discount from the manufacturer. A local bank deposited cash in an account to cover some expenses as well.

Dale Kirby, on the other hand, chose to build his ramp independent of a home builder association or a charitable entity. To be fair, Kirby has an edge on some of the other online Ramp-a-Thon pledges: He's done this before, as he's done a lot of work for state agencies, and from time to time they let him know about someone who's in need of a ramp.

Kirby says he usually builds two to three ramps each year for which he donates the materials and his labor. The ramp he just completed for the Ramp-a-Thon is 3½ feet wide and 8 feet long, for a 12-year-old boy who relies on a wheelchair. Kirby follows ADA guidelines, though he builds some ramps wider to accommodate bigger wheelchairs, and if the ramp user also walks, he puts in a graspable handrail as well.

This year, in addition to encouraging his cyber colleagues to build ramps, MacDonald is coordinating his HBA's 2009 Ramp-a-Thon. As of this writing, he had one recipient lined up and was confident he'd have another four by the end of April; depending on the schedules of the other builders, he hoped to break ground in May or June. MacDonald says he's not able to leave his home and business to help victims of large-scale natural tragedies rebuild, but "this I can do." — Laurie Elden

Resources

ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG)

access-board.gov/adaag/html/adaag.htm

"Building a Safe Ramp"

Question & Answer, PDB, January/February 2009
deckmagazine.com/article/184.html

"Wood Ramp Design"

The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University
design.ncsu.edu/cud/pubs_p/docs/rampbooklet296final.pdf

New regulations on subcontractor classification went into effect January 1 in Minnesota, perhaps indicating a trend as similar laws have recently been enacted in a number of states, including Illinois, Massachusetts, and Oregon. To be considered subcontractors — rather than employees of the contractors for whom they're working — sole proprietors in the construction industry in Minnesota must now hold an Independent Contractor Exemption Certificate (ICEC) from the state's Department of Labor and Industry (www.doli.state.mn.us/ic). According to the new law, independent contractors must have their own facilities and equipment, have ongoing business liabilities or obligations, and satisfy seven other conditions to qualify for an ICEC. Sole proprietors who do not act as subcontractors do not need an ICEC.

Hem-fir has been approved for treatment with Osmose's MicroPro, a micronized-copper quat (MCQ) preservative that has been used for three years to treat southern yellow pine. In February, third-party testing cleared the use of MicroPro-treated incised hem-fir for above ground and ground contact, according to Mike Reimer, president of Western Wood Preserving Co., in Sumner, Wash., and the company has been treating decking and dimensional materials since then. Western Wood Preserving and incised hem-fir are both listed in the February 2009 update of Osmose's ICC-ES Evaluation Report ESR-1980.

Contractors doing at least \$5,000 of home improvement work a year in Pennsylvania will

need to register with the state beginning July 1 to comply with the Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act. The new law applies to jobs valued at more than \$500; new-home construction and most landscaping work are exempt. It also makes contracts with unregistered contractors unenforceable and designates home-improvement fraud as a third-degree felony if the job is valued at more than \$2,000. Registration will cost \$50 every two years and requires contractors to have \$50,000 in both personal injury and property damage insurance.

Copper azole type C (CA-C), a preservative developed by Arch Treatment Technologies, was approved by the American Wood Protection Association (AWPA) in January for listing in the *AWPA Book of Standards*. It contains dissolved copper and tebuconazole like CBA-A and CA-B (which have had AWPA listings for some time), but unlike those, it also contains the fungicide propiconazole. CA-C is one of two copper azole preservatives used in Wolmanized Residential Outdoor wood.

Three large 2009 pickups came up short in the latest round of side-crash tests performed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), a nonprofit research organization funded by auto insurers. The Dodge Ram 1500, which has standard side airbags, earned a rating of "marginal." When tested with their optional side airbags, the Nissan Titan was rated "marginal," while the Chevrolet Silverado 1500 got the lowest rating, "poor." At the other end of the spectrum, the

Honda Ridgeline, the Ford F-150, and the Toyota Tundra won Top Safety Pick awards in an earlier round of testing. To conduct the tests, the IIHS uses a barrier that replicates an SUV or a pickup striking the pickups, unlike the car-height barrier used in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's side-crash tests.

Both the commercial and residential building industries will continue to suffer through 2009, according to the *2009 Construction Outlook Spring Update* from McGraw-Hill Construction. The study predicts a 27 percent decline for commercial projects and a 31 percent decline in the residential sector.

More than 300 Hispanic contractors received free OSHA-certified safety training sponsored by Makita U.S.A. and Wrangler Western Wear. The programs complement Makita's recent efforts to market to Hispanic workers. ❖