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Feature Home

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Resting on a street corner near the center of the village of Paw Paw, she looked old and tired. Built in 1888, the once grand house stood empty and waiting for someone to care for her again.

The homeowners chose Kevin Osborne of Osborne Construction & Maintenance to transform the old house into their "forever" home.



Parchment School District



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Choosing a Garage Door and Opener

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MEET THE PUBLISHERS

Spring always feels like a season of fresh starts - and for us, this one truly is.

My name is Jessica Luepke, and my husband, Mike, and I are excited and incredibly grateful to introduce ourselves as the new owners of Minuteman Press (formerly JB Printing) and PA Stringer Press, the publishing company of *Welcome Home*.

When we're not in the print shop or working on this magazine, we're busy raising two teenage boys and navigating the everyday moments that make a house feel like home. Over the past two decades as small business owners in West Michigan, we've developed a deep respect for what it takes to build something meaningful - and we're grateful to help tell those stories here.

Those values are at the heart of why this magazine matters to us. We're proud to carry forward a publication that has long connected readers with the people and places that make this area special.

If you're a local business owner interested in being featured in Welcome Home, we'd love to connect. We understand how valuable it is to share your work with the community, and we'd be honored to help spotlight your services.

You'll continue to see *Welcome Home* circulating throughout the greater Kalamazoo area four times per year, mailed directly to households and available in many local businesses and public spaces across the region. Our hope is that it remains a resource you can enjoy, flip through, and return to throughout the seasons.

Here's to new beginnings and a bright spring ahead.

Warmly,

Jessica and Mike Luepke

Publishers, *Welcome Home*
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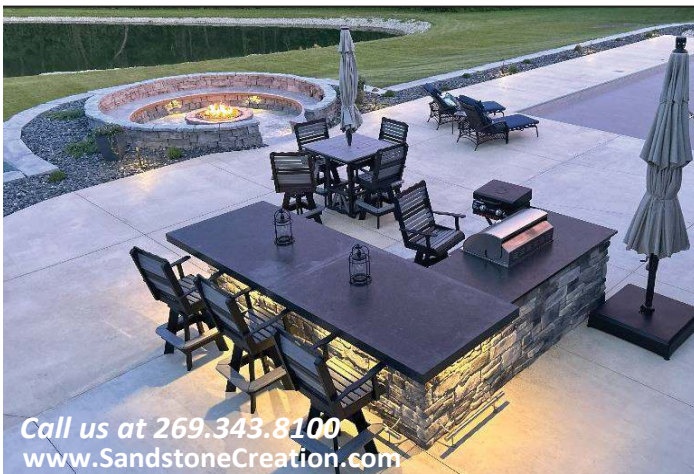
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By Barbara Fisher
Photos Courtesy of Parchment School District



Parchment School District
Home of the Panthers

Parchment is a riverfront community established in 1930 as a village with a population of 511. Residents voted to become a city in 1939. Almost a century later the population hovers at just about four times that. Originally carved out of the northern part of Kalamazoo Township, Parchment derives its name from a parchment company that manufactured paper on the east bank of the Kalamazoo River. Joseph Kindleberger was the driving force behind establishing and sustaining Parchment and his family donated the 40 acres that is Kindleberger Park, the park boasting recreational areas, walking paths and a formal garden with a gazebo; a popular location for weddings.

The Parchment School District was established in 1959 and today has an enrollment of 1,534, offering a rich array of educational and community oriented opportunities.

The Parchment Early Learning Center is a state licensed, childcare and preschool program serving the district's youngest Panthers, focusing on developmental skills and school readiness for children 12 months to 4 year-olds. The Center offers tuition-based childcare and wrap-around care, as well as a Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP). GSRP is Michigan's state-funded, free PreK program for eligible four-year-olds. Ranked #1 in the U.S., GSRP is a safe place where children learn how to get along with others, share,

take turns, and make friends. Math, reading, and thinking skills are taught every day through fun, hands-on activities.

For grades K-5, before and after school programming is offered through Wrap Around Care, a self-funded, licensed child care program located at Northwood Elementary.

The district has three elementary schools: Central Elementary (Young 5s – Grade 3); Northwood Elementary (Grades K-3), and North Elementary (Grades 4-5).

The Parchment Middle School houses grades 6-8 and Parchment High School offers both in person and online instructional models.

Parchment High School completes the students' K-12 journey with traditional education augmented by career exploration, special events and community service. Kelly Milliman, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, highlighted that a trip to Peru took place in June of 2025. The trip was open to any interested high school student (and parents). The trip was organized through Educational Tours and for many students, the trip represented the first time students left the country. Multiple fundraisers were organized to raise money to help pay for the trip. Advanced Placement courses and exams give students the chance to tackle college-level work and earn college credit while they're still in high school. Numerous Honors courses



provide more challenging coursework than standard classes, assisting students prepare for college. Dr. Sarah Neumann, Superintendent, explained that Parchment also offers participation in dual enrollment and Early/Middle College. The Kalamazoo County Early/Middle College program allows students to earn a free associate's degree or certificate by completing a fifth year of high school. Students delay high school graduation for one year while they take college courses at Kalamazoo Valley Community College.

The Parchment Innovation Center is a virtual program that offers traditional credit recovery to both in-person and virtual students. This dropout recovery program is designed to help students who have left the traditional school system re-engage with their education and earn their high school diploma explained Dr. Neumann.

The Parchment School District is woven into the greater community with scores of partnerships to their credit. The district has engaged in the High-Impact Leadership Project for several years, recently adopting the school reform model as their primary improvement model where they engage in collaborative learning and planning around continuous improvement. Dr. Neumann explained that Parchment is "the only one in the region that has taken a K-12 approach to this process, and it has been exciting to partner with WMU on this important work. It was even more exciting to see our teams working together to design the path forward for their buildings!"

Dr. Neumann shared that several of the district's 4th-8th graders recently participated in the Amazing Shake, where students faced professional interview settings, public questions, and random scenarios where they were





judged on their ability to show poise, confidence, professionalism, and other life skills. "To say I was impressed is an understatement. As adults it would have been difficult to put ourselves out there like these kids did; these are life lessons that our kids will take with them forever. It's exactly the kind of experience that makes me so proud to be part of this amazing community!"

The district also partners with The First Day Shoe Fund, that supports schools across the country to provide new athletic shoes for elementary students; the local Sunrise Kiwanis sponsors the shoes for one of the buildings. Movie nights, an annual Veterans' Breakfast, teacher intern programs, annual Holiday Wassailing, community tailgates, and a Trunk or Treat hosted by WMU's Future Teachers of Color are but a few of the community endeavors that the district has hosted recently.

The Parchment Panthers are a Class B school and part of the Southwestern Athletic Conference (18 schools strong). Panthers start honing their prowess in a variety of middle school sports (basketball, cross-country, football, soccer, track & field, volleyball and wrestling) before moving on to high school sports (all those listed under middle school, plus baseball, bowling, cheer, golf, powerlifting and softball). The Panthers proudly captured State Championships in Volleyball in 1976 and 2000, and Men's Soccer in 1985.

For more information on the Parchment District Schools, call (269) 488.1050 or visit <https://www.parchmentschools.org>.

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A Quality Bath Remodel Takes Time

By Zinta Aistars

Turn on the television and the commercials soon appear—one company after another promising to turn your outdated and unattractive bathroom into a spa-like, gleaming wonder. In one day.

Calling the companies that appear on the commercials usually brings one to a headquarters located out of state with, one hopes, a team of subcontractors available in the west Michigan area to do the job.

“Local matters,” says Michael Scott, project manager at JRD Construction, LLC, in Kalamazoo. “Local can often mean lower overhead with contractors who live in your community. It can mean more personal service, because we are right here. JRD Construction is a small, family-owned business, here since 2020.”

But is the renovation of a bathroom in one day even possible?

“In an ideal scenario, if all you want is to replace a tub or older shower with an insert, all in one piece, I suppose it might be possible,” Scott says. “Contractors might come in, take measurements with a laser measuring tool, go back to a warehouse to make a pre-fab insert, and put that in. If you are adjusting anything or adding anything, however, I don’t see how that could be possible.”

Adjustments of any kind—tiling and grouting, relocating plumbing, replacing flooring, painting, wiring lighting, or adding any other features to the bathroom—all require time.

“Even one week would be tight,” Scott says. “For the most part, we tell our customers to plan on two to three weeks.”

The usual process, he says, begins with a free consultation. Scott or a team member visit your home to access your bathroom, take precise measurements, and talk to the homeowner about what they would like done and what they can fit into their budget. Shower, tub, vanity, new paint and flooring, plumbing moved to another area, lighting, it can all be done.

“Once we have that discussion, I return to the office to put together an estimate,” Scott says. “That can take a day or two. We itemize labor and materials, add in all the details, consider your budget, and put it all together for your consideration. We don’t offer financing, so that would have to come from the homeowners’ budget or many use their home equity line. There can be some sticker shock, because bathrooms and kitchens are the most expensive rooms to build and renovate.”



If the homeowner approves the estimate, JDK Construction adds the project onto their schedule. On average, there is a month or two of a waiting list. During that time, a team of contractors, plumbers, electricians, and painters is put together and materials are ordered.

A deposit of half to one-third of the overall cost is required before the work begins. Cost of such a project varies greatly as some renovations are a simple update of a shower while others are a complete renovation of the room with materials that might even ship overseas.

First step in the project is the demo to remove all the old to be replaced by the new.

"That's where some of the time comes in, too, with all the steps taken," Scott adds. "Most bathrooms aren't that large, so if the electrician is working in there, the tiler will wait for another day to do that work. Tiling and grouting alone can take up to a week. Flooring will take a different day. And so on."

Should the home have only one bathroom, Scott says his team leaves the toilet in the room, removing if needed through the workday and





again replacing it at the end of each day until the job is done.

"Unfortunately, in that case the homeowner will have to make arrangements to shower elsewhere until the job is done," Scott says.

When contacting JRD Construction for the project, Scott suggests bringing him your ideas—including clippings and pictures or even sketches of what you would like to have your finished bathroom look like as a starting point. Designers can be brought in if you need help visualizing your dream bathroom.

"The options are limitless," he says. "When you work with us, know that we can do it all. Our sister company is Chateau Homes. We do commercial as well as residential work, build new homes or remodel older homes. What we do better than most, I believe, is communication. So many times, customers tell me they tried several other companies and waited and waited, but never even received a response. We always respond. We always follow up. We communicate with you throughout the project, every step of the way. And what we say we will do, we will do. Quality takes time."

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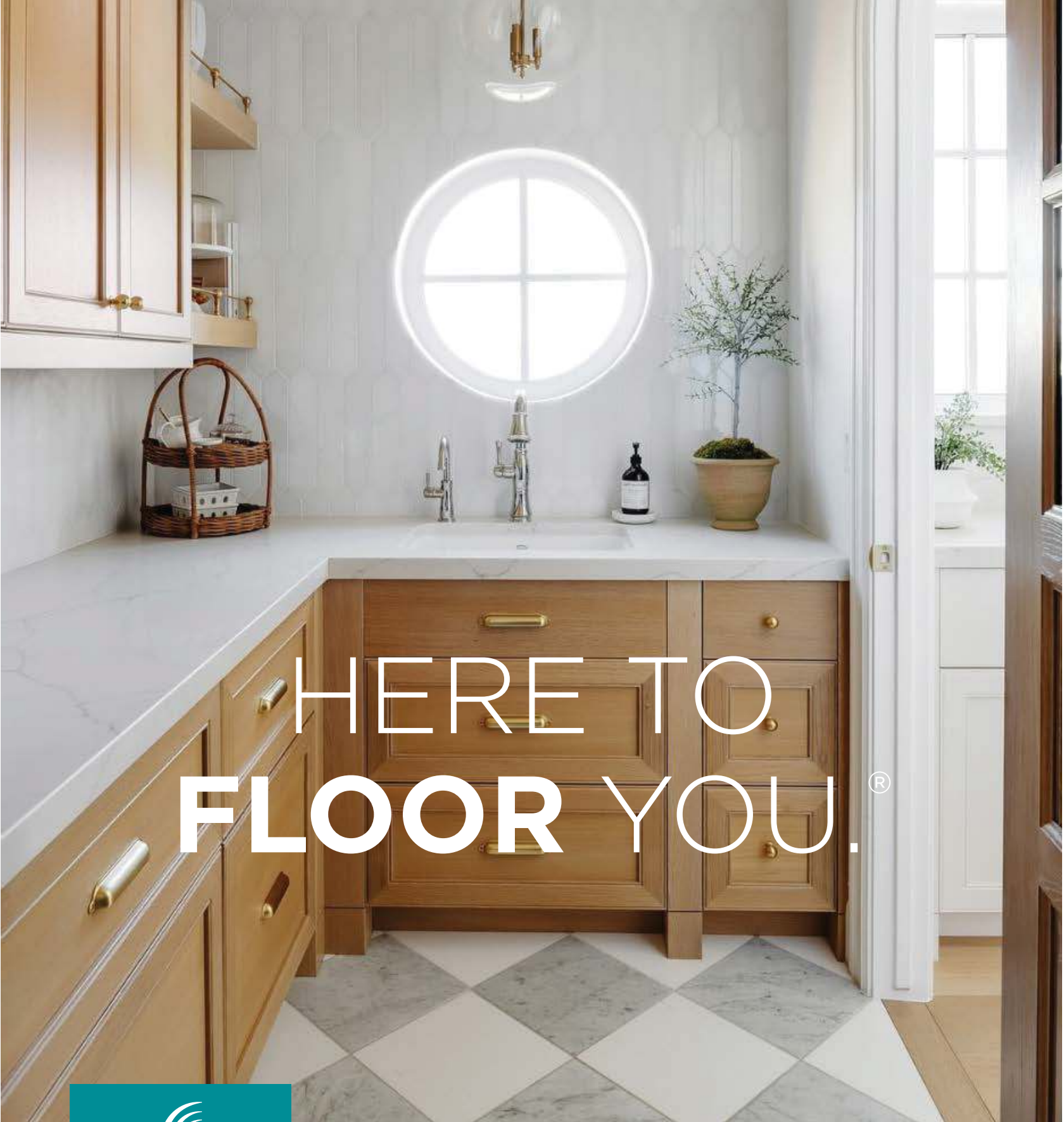
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A Seamless Connection Between Past and Present

By Zinta Aistars

Feature Photography by Next Door Photos Kalamazoo

Resting on a street corner near the center of the village of Paw Paw, she looked old and tired. Built in 1888, the once grand house had been converted into three apartments. Now, she stood empty and waiting for someone to care for her again.

A COUPLE MOVING NORTH FROM TEXAS SAW THE POSSIBILITIES.

"We wanted to move closer to family and we wanted to live in a walkable neighborhood," the new homeowner said. "This would be our fourth house, our fourth forever home—although all our homes have been forever homes," she laughed.

This time "forever" took solid shape. It began with tearing out the interior of the house—down to the studs.

"Family told us about Kevin Osborne of Osborne Construction & Maintenance, and so we went with him," the homeowner said. Homeowners and builder talked first in April 2023 about the project.

Divisions between the three apartments came down. One apartment had been at the front of the house, another on the second floor, and a third was a later addition at the back.

In July 2023, Osborne and his team began the demo process. It would be a two-year project. The goal for both homeowners and builder was to maintain the historic look

of the property and stay with much of the original floor plan with only necessary changes. Sandborn maps from 1905 helped direct their decisions for the renovation.

"We build new homes and renovate old houses," Osborne said. "This house was incredibly well built, one of the best builds we've ever seen."

Osborne called in Valentina Velkova, owner of ADIDA—Architectural Design/Interior Design/Art—to help him create a cohesive structure while maintaining historic integrity.

"I grew up in Bulgaria, a country filled with historical buildings, often 200 years or more," Velkova said. "Part of my education was specifically on historic builds. Working on this home in Paw Paw was a dream project. Historical homes are a value to treasure."

"We wanted the home to look like it was always supposed to look, not like a renovation," Osborne said. "As we did the demo, we could see the original features of the house. We did open spaces more as old homes tended to be very compartmentalized and with long, skinny hallways."

Another challenge the Osborne team encountered was the framing of the older windows. Framing and window sizes were different in the past, but the team worked to match the older style when replacing with new windows while keeping their height.

The third floor of the home had been closed off. Osborne's team opened it back up and added a mechanical









area with a second furnace. The home was brought up to current energy efficient standards, using spray foam insulation and insulating the rock basement as well, commonly known as a “Michigan Basement.”

The renovated home, now open to 3,285 square feet, has three bedrooms with a fourth that is now used as an office, three full baths with cherry cabinetry plus a half bath, walk-in closets, family room and living room, a chef-worthy kitchen with food pantry and 9' x 4' island that opens onto a dining room with fireplace, a second office upstairs and a home gym.

“What makes this home so stunning are the many tall windows and exceptionally high ceilings, rather typical for that time when it was built,” said Velkova. “We kept all that. There is also a striking staircase when you come in the front door, but the old ones were very steep and didn’t meet today’s code. We enlarged the foyer and the space for the stairs but kept to the old style.”

Floors throughout the home are white oak, bathrooms with porcelain tiles, but a unique feature in the foyer is the parquet flooring.

“It’s kind of a 3-D effect in its design,” Osborne said. “Modern but classic.”

Other details include wainscoting throughout much of the home, graceful archways and trim work throughout, and a restored stained-glass window viewed from the grand staircase. Where “smart” features are possible, they have been added in, including lighting and window coverings that can be remotely controlled.

Special features don’t stop there. The homeowners purchased a vacant lot behind the home, expanding their yard to include a patio and pergola. Landscaping was done by Jim Garrison of Sandstone Creations.

“The challenge was to blend the classic charm of an old house with a modern aesthetic,” Garrison said. “We integrated raised planting beds using clean minimal retaining wall blocks. For the pergola and patio area we addressed the same challenge by laying large scale modern pavers in classic patterns, like the running bond and herringbone patterns. The plantings were carefully selected to provide interest year-round.”

A 30’ deep two-car garage was added in back with enough space in back for a work area.

“But it’s the front porch where I had to add my southern touch,” the homeowner smiled. “It has a blue ceiling.”

Blue ceilings in porches have long been a tradition in the south to mimic the blue of the sky and so discourage birds from building nests there but also to ward away evil spirits.

The exterior of the home is done in LP Smart Siding by Jeffrey Michael Contracting. Tom Palarz at Nehil-Sivak did the structural engineering for the home. All tile work and countertops were done by ProSource of Kalamazoo, and painting and finishing were completed by Kalamazoo Custom Home Painting. Finished in April 2025, the home was featured in the August 2025 Parade of Homes.

“Kevin [Osborne] and his team of carpenters are so talented,” the homeowner said. “Working with him was a breeze. And Val at ADIDA really listened to what we wanted, and she always came through. Now we live in a community where we hardly ever have to drive, since both of us work from home. Groceries, restaurants, post office, family—all within reach. We love it.”



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Quench Your Thirst with the Cleanest Water

By Zinta Alistars

Nothing quenches thirst like a tall, cold glass of sparkling clean water. No need to buy gallon jugs and six-packs of bottled water at the grocery store to get the best water. In fact, studies show that bottled water is often not as clean as tap water, straight from your faucet.

It is easy to see that water from the tap is more environmentally friendly than bottled water. Millions of tons of plastic bottles top off landfills. Draining rivers and streams and lakes is an added ecological disaster from the bottled water industry.

BUT IS IT CLEANER? NO.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) oversees the quality of water that comes out of your tap. The EPA has made some misses, however, and tap water can at times contain lead or PFAS, atrazine, and nitrates.

Much of bottled water, on the other hand, has little to no regulation, depending on the state, and may contain microplastics and various chemicals, including lead and PFAS, and possibly bacteria. Some states simply bottle tap water and sell what is freely available from your kitchen faucet (Natural Resources Defense Council, October 2025).

Rick Marcus, owner of Pro Water Treatment, LLC, at 5716 West D Ave, Unit B, in Kalamazoo, has been in the business of bringing clean water to greater Kalamazoo for 37 years. He installs, maintains, and repairs water softeners, reverse osmosis systems, iron ion filters, and carbon filtering in homes and businesses. Equipment may be purchased or rented.

"If you are moving into a new home or if you are using well water, have your water tested," Marcus says. "That's usually part of the process of moving into a new home. There are some 80,000 chemicals manufactured in the world. In our area, you may generally find bacteria and nitrates. Depending on where you are, some areas have arsenic in the water. Have a certified lab test your water. They can test for lead, too. Licensed well drillers will test it for you also."

The State of Michigan recommends testing water every two years, but unless there is some major change in your area, Marcus says that testing that often may not be necessary. Newer wells are built better, he says.

Installing a water softener in your home can be one of the most efficient and convenient ways to provide clean water.

"Hard water builds up in your pipes," he says. "The iron can stain your bath and sink with orange rust, and that's hard to clean. It causes soap to 'curd,' leaving a film of soap on fabrics, dishes, your skin—anything you wash. Eventually even block the pores of your skin."

THE BENEFITS, HE SAYS, ARE MANY.

"Appliances last longer," Marcus lists. "No scaling on fixtures. The water heater and washing machine work more efficiently. No limescale film on shower doors. Softer skin, easier hair management, softer and cleaner fabrics out of the laundry. Washing in soft water can leave your skin feeling silky, and that's because it doesn't wash away your

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natural skin oils. Water softeners can also remove lead, magnesium, calcium and other irritants from your water."

Salt-free water softeners do not soften water, he explains.

"That's a scam," he says. "They don't soften water. They condition it. Salt is a natural element, so I wouldn't worry about hurting the environment or your septic system. With today's water softeners, the salt used will actually improve the bacteria in your septic system."

According to a University of Madison-Wisconsin study, the no-salt water softeners have also failed to prevent scale formation while hard water minerals remain in the water.

Quality of the salt used in the softener also makes a difference. Several varieties are on the market: rock salt, solar salt, evaporated salt, potassium chloride, and others.

"Rock salt is the worst," Marcus says. "It can have the most impurities in it because it comes from underground salt deposits. Because of the impurities, it can lead to clogs or other maintenance issues."

Solar salt comes from seawater that companies evaporate using the heat of sunlight. It is more pure than rock salt and so costs more. Solar salt is also more eco-friendly since it does not rely on harmful salt mining practices used for mining rock salt. Because of its purity, it causes fewer issues with softener equipment.

Evaporated or pellet salt, created through steam evaporation, is among the costliest types of salt because it is the purest. Because of its purity, it works best with softener equipment.

Water softeners are not the only way to purify drinking water.

"There are some good carbon filters on the market that can be used in water filters or attached to faucets," Marcus says. "The trick is to remember to change the filter. We send out reminders to our customers if it is our equipment, because people forget to change the filters all the time, and then the water becomes actually worse as it goes through a dirty filter."

Brita filters are good, he says, and Zero filters are even better. A reverse osmosis system is best of all. Reverse osmosis is a water purification process that uses a semi-permeable membrane to remove dissolved salts and impurities. A reverse osmosis system can be installed to filter all the water coming into the home—or a compact countertop reverse osmosis machine that simply cleans drinking water placed in a convenient location.

An iron ion filter is another environmentally-friendly option to clean contaminants without the use of additional chemicals or salt. These filters can protect pipes from iron clogging and black oxidation caused by sulfur while also protecting appliances, clothing, and fixtures.

"Just remember to change those filters," Marcus repeats. "And call us for regular maintenance. I am dedicated to my customers, service-minded before profit. And when it comes to good, clean water, I know what's going on."



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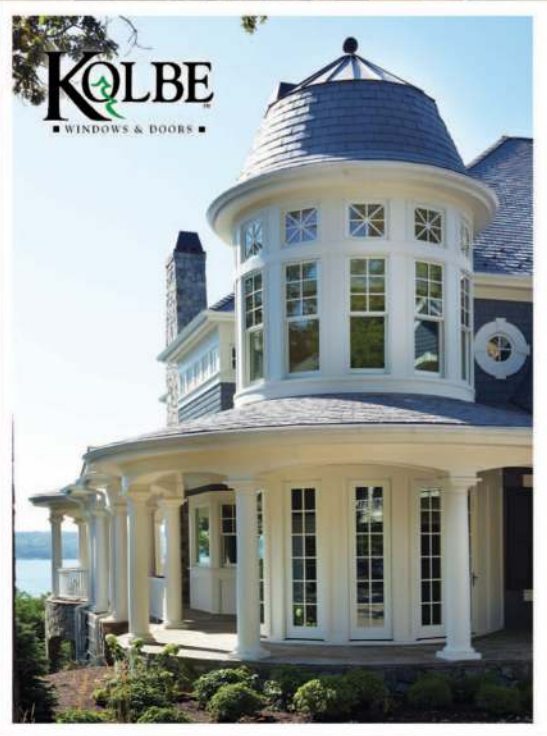
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Choosing the Perfect Garage Door and Opener

By Zinta Aistars

The days of having to get out of the car, perhaps even into a rain or snowstorm, to open a heavy garage door, are long gone. Push a button and it's "open sesame"—that magical phrase from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. We can fly right in on our magic carpet and stay safe and out of the elements.

Most of us don't give much thought to how that garage door opens, but the garage door openers we choose to install can make a difference. We don't think about it until something catches or grates or won't open at all. A garage door is more than an opening for our vehicles, however. A garage door adds to the security and value of our home.

When considering the purchase of a garage door and opener, several factors affect the final choice. Expert advice from Gavin Tolmacs, who oversees commercial and residential sales at Overhead Door Company of Kalamazoo, 5291 Wynn Road in Kalamazoo, and Bob Kemp, sales manager at Abode Building Center, 8308 Shaver Road in Portage, guide your decision.

- Door size and weight – Chain drive or direct drive openers work best for larger, heavier doors, while belt or screw drives are used for lighter doors.
- Door material – Steel and aluminum doors are most common and are lightweight, but wood is an option for heavier doors, which may require more horsepower to lift.
- Horsepower -- 1/2 HP works well for most two-car sectional doors, while 3/4 HP to 1 1/2 HP is best for heavy, single-piece, or oversized doors.
- Noise level – Openers running on chains can be the noisiest. If looking for a quieter opener, choose belt, screw drive, or jackshaft openers.
- Budget – Chain drive openers are the most budget-friendly and durable, while belt drive openers can cost more but make less noise. Jackshaft or direct drive cost most but are also the quietest to operate.

PROS AND CONS WHEN CHOOSING OPENERS

Chain drive garage door openers are the most budget-friendly openers and most often chosen by homeowners.

They use a metal chain to move the garage door along the track on the ceiling of the garage. They may, however, need more maintenance than other openers and create the most noise when operated, even while strong enough to be used on the heavier doors.

Belt drive openers, while only minimally more costly than chain drive, use a rubber belt to raise the door in place of a chain. They offer quieter operation and less maintenance, but the belt can wear out over time.

Screw drive openers are within the same cost range, but they use a rotating metal rod to open the door. Because they have fewer moving parts, they require less maintenance, but they can be less reliable in extreme temperatures and aren't suited for heavier doors.

Direct drive openers move the motor along a stationary chain. Quieter than other openers, these openers are among the more costly but offer a longer life span. They can be a good choice for taller garage doors.

Drawbar or trolley openers are available in both chain and belt drive versions with torsion or extension springs. They are among the most common and least expensive, suitable for most residential garage doors. This type of opener may be noisier and require more maintenance.

Jackshaft openers are among the costliest options but are also among the quietest and require minimal maintenance. Because they are wall-mounted at the sides, they are ideal for lower ceilings and difficult spaces.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT GARAGE DOOR FOR YOUR HOME

"Most people still go for the steel and aluminum doors," says Gavin Tolmacs at Overhead Door. "But there are new styles available with plank design doors, steel made to look like wood grain. They aren't painted, but they have digital printing, so they can be longer lasting. The older style was baked-on polyester."

New home builds, Tolmacs says, tend to use these new styles, adding a minimal upcharge as one might with new car trim.

"The newer door styles may have raised panels, glass at top, with a steel baked-on finish," Bob Kemp at Abode Building Center says. "The steel doors with a mock wood grain finish are available in several stain colors for a small upcharge. It's when you want an all-glass door or something more specialized that cost can really get higher."

The different types of garage doors, aside from finishes, fall into categories of a roll-up garage door that rolls up in one piece; sectional garage door that rolls up section by section; counterweight garage door with counter weights replacing torsion springs; sliding garage door, which opens side to side or outward; or tilt up or canopy doors that tilt up and out or retract in one piece.

When choosing the garage door, consider also insulation, available with some styles to maintain a more energy-efficient garage. The higher the R-value, the slower the transmission of heat, so less cold air is coming into the garage. Higher R-values mean the door is more energy efficient.

CALLING ON A PROFESSIONAL

It is possible to install a garage door and opener yourself, but it is not recommended. Professionals bring expertise to the job, often offer better quality products than box stores, but they also ensure that components are properly aligned for safety and functionality. They will also know about building codes and safety standards.

"We've been in the business for 53 years," Tolmács says about Overhead Door. "We are family-owned while being part of a nationwide network. We pride ourselves on buying our doors direct, so we can give our customers a lower cost and more oversight. We are also the only local company that sells parts over the counter if you are a do-it-yourselfer."

Bob Kemp at the Abode Building Center offers something of a one-stop shop as Abode offers a wider range of construction services—garage doors are only one part of what they do, he says. "We are family-owned in Kalamazoo since 1981. If you are remodeling or building a new home, our contractors can come in and do all the work for you."



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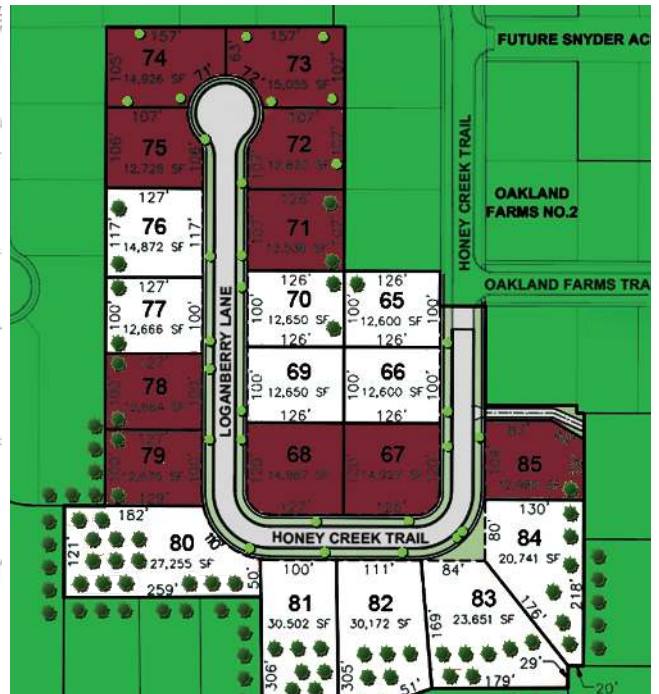
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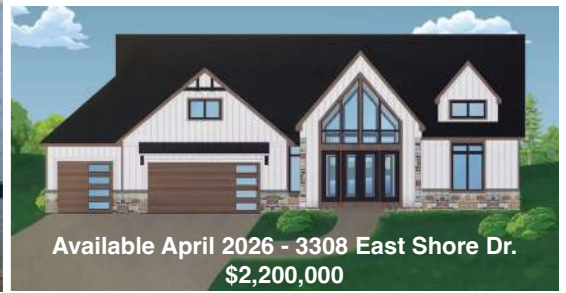
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