



handsOn

A Newsletter of the
Boston Building Materials Co-op and
the Building Materials Resource Center

fall/winter 2003

Remembering Our Roots/Facing the Future: The BBMC Marks 25 Years

By Beth Ginga

Flashback to 1978. If you're old enough, you can't help but remember the energy crisis, with long gas lines and high home heating bills. That memory is not so distant, given our nation's continued reliance on finite supplies of fossil fuels (and the consequences of that dependence). What may be harder to recall in these days of half-million dollar home prices is the housing crisis of the late 70's, a time when banks could not be convinced to give would-be homebuyers mortgages for as little as \$10,000 in Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. Devalued property made maintenance an unaffordable luxury, which in turn contributed to higher energy bills in un-insulated homes. Houses, and whole neighborhoods, fell prey to urban blight — disrepair, neglect, abandonment, and arson.

The Co-op's birth in 1978 was a response to these very circumstances, the brainchild of Co-op founder John Rowse. John's desire to help modest income people and inner city dwellers lower their heating bills led him to develop a program of portable, blown-in insulation and storm window installation. Rowse believed local residents could improve their homes — and neighborhoods — if offered the necessary materials at affordable prices, and taught to do the work themselves. HUD agreed and, in 1980, supplied \$250,000 in seed money. With blower machine and cellulose insulation in tow, Rowse and co-workers traveled from house to house. Once John showed up at their doors he was a walking, talking fount of information on home maintenance and repair, all of which he dispensed in understandable terms and with no strings attached.

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It's a Small World After All

By Beth Ginga

When Patricia Chacon ventures into her town's new library, be it to study for an exam or check out a collection of short stories, chances are she'll hunker down in a cozy chair that once provided seating at Parson's Engineering firm, formerly of Canton, MA. The story of the chair's journey from a modest Massachusetts town to a small Nicaraguan village, though unique in its details, typifies daily life at the Building Material Resource Center — bringing together people and organizations who are in possession of items that they no longer need with people and organizations who need them.

In May of 2002, Parson's Engineering was carrying out its plan to relocate from their

suburban home to downtown Boston. The move produced a large quantity of surplus office furniture and it fell to Barbara Gerber at Parsons to deal with the dilemma.

Barbara contacted the Building Materials Resource Center. Though unable to accept and distribute the donations directly (we don't typically handle furniture), the BMRC was very interested in helping to insure that the furniture stay out of the waste stream and find a good home. Serving as a link, the BMRC emailed their many nonprofit contacts, supplying detailed information about the available furniture, including descriptions and photos.

One organization that was thrilled to hear of the windfall

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Thank You to Our Donors
and Funders



Co-Op News

New “Flex-Tec HV” Wood Filler Now at the Co-op

For those of you who have been looking for a durable and reliable wood filler, we think we’ve found one. Flex-Tec HV wood filler, a relatively new product, is a high-quality, two-part epoxy system engineered to expand and contract with wood. Manufactured by Advanced Repair Technology, this product is engineered to remain flexible over time, has outstanding bonding strength and, after curing, can be shaped, sanded, drilled and painted. Although the up-front cost is high, at \$144.50 for the complete starter kit, the epoxy is a very cost-effective alternative to replacing window sills, window sash, porch columns and endless other wood surfaces. The starter kit includes two-part primer, two-part epoxy system, and dual cartridge caulking gun. Large replacement cartridges are \$49.50 and smaller ones are \$25. Stop by for a look at our helpful display.

Products at the Co-op to Help You Conserve Energy this Winter

The Co-op has a long, strong history in the field of energy conservation. As a result, we carry a large and ever expanding selection of weatherization products.

Bronze Weatherstripping.

This hard-to-find weatherstripping comes in rolls of 100’ for \$42.50 and rolls of 7’ for \$6.00.

Door Kits. The Co-op’s own Door Kits are an excellent choice for keeping the heat in this winter. Just \$9.50 per kit.

Tyzall Interior Storm

Windows. An inexpensive way to seal in your drafty windows without obscuring your view. Just \$6.00 apiece.

High Temperature Fiberglass

Pipe Insulation. Great for insulating pipes in hot water and steam heating systems. Call for pricing.

Programmable Thermostat.

This popular item allows homeowners to program their thermostat to keep heating costs down. From \$53.

And so much more!

Call or check our new website for a complete list of weatherization products offered at the Co-op — 617.442.2262 / www.bbmc.com

Reliable Low-Flow Toilets

Toto Toilets continue to be a popular item at the Co-op. Well-designed, low-flow toilets can be hard to find — and we think we’ve found them. The Co-op stocks three different sizes of white, round-front Toto low-flow toilets — 10”, 12” and 14” (rough) — and we have yet to hear from an unhappy customer. The 12” is the most popular size and sells for \$100.



www.bbmc.com

Soon to be up and running!

The Boston Building Materials Co-op is pleased to announce its new and improved website. The new site should be live by late November. Check it out! www.bbmc.com

Need a Tool but Don’t Want to Buy it?

Check out the Co-op’s Tool Rental List

In case you didn’t already know, the Co-op has a small inventory of tools that we make available to our members for a modest rental fee:

- Our newest tools — a **Portable Die Grinder** is helpful for preparing wood surfaces prior to application of Flex-Tec HV and other wood fillers, and a **Dual Cartridge Caulking Gun** (see Flex Tech

article at left);

- Another popular tool is the **Cellulose Insulation Blower**. This machine is an easy way to insulate your home against the cold of winter. It’s simple to use (we’ll show you how) and will help lower your home heating bills this winter;
- Other tools include a **Narrow Staple Gun** for window rehab and a **40’ Ladder** for work on tall buildings.

Note: All Co-op prices listed here reflect member discount.

Harvey Window and Door Products Help Keep Warm Air In — and Cold Air Out!

With the cooler weather now upon us, remember that the Co-op has a great selection of Harvey storm windows and doors. In addition to these, we carry a full line of replacement and new construction windows and all types of interior and exterior doors by Harvey as well as Atrium, Weathershield, Boston Sash, Brosco, Buffelen, and more.

November Only! Harvey Vinyl Replacement Window Promotion. Now through November 28, 2003, don't miss Harvey's Vinyl Replacement Window Free Low-E Promotion. Log onto www.harveyfind.com to download your discount coupon or call 1.800.9HARVEY. Don't miss this opportunity to get quality replacement windows at a great price.



SHOP NEWS

Be sure to take advantage of our ongoing Window and Screen Repair Clinics on the first and third Saturdays of the month, 9:00-10:00 am. Anyone who has had the pleasure of working alongside Shop Instructor Rafael Quezada will agree that he can make even the most challenging job enjoyable. By paying for materials only, this is a great opportunity to save money as well as learn a new skill.

On the other hand, if you'd rather have someone else do the work for you, we can help. We offer a full line of shop services for very reasonable prices.

a real ice breaker

Several years ago we set out to find a product that would not only help our customers deal with the slippery, icy, conditions of winter but also be environmentally safe. **The result is our Co-op Melt.** Co-op Melt is a unique combination of an ingredient that breaks up ice (used on runways at Logan Airport) and sand, which creates traction and reduces slipping.

If you'd like to try a remarkable product that minimizes groundwater pollution, damage to trees and landscaping, the corrosion of metals and concrete, yet still achieves the same safety results as traditional toxic ice salts, try our Co-op Melt.

Come by the **BBMC** for your **Co-op Ice Melt.**

Boston Building Materials Co-op

100 Terrace Street
Boston, MA 02120



T: 617-442-2262
F: 617-427-2491

Lower Prices on Rechargeable Batteries

Recent technological advances in nickel metal hydride batteries, otherwise known as rechargeable batteries, have resulted in much lower costs — savings the Co-op is pleased to pass along to its members and customers. Four-packs of AA rechargeable batteries are now just \$7.75. Four-packs AAAs and 9V (single pack, the size most smoke detectors use) are \$7.00. Batteries may be recharged more than 500 times in the four-bay charger that we sell for \$16.00. (*Note: Co-op prices listed above reflect member discount.*)

Building Materials Resource Center Welcomes AmeriCorps*VISTA Volunteer

We are pleased to announce the arrival of Leslie Hunt, our very first AmeriCorps*VISTA Volunteer, as a member of the BMRC team. Leslie comes to us from Jamaica Plain, leaving a long-time dental practice (yes, she is a dentist) to try something “completely different.” Her job during her 12-month assignment is to cast the BMRC’s net far and wide, getting the word out about the Center to customers and materials donors from all over the Greater Boston area.

In her short time on the job so far, Leslie’s work has yielded notable increases in the volume and quality of building materials coming into the Center as well as many new customers.

As an AmeriCorps*Vista Volunteer, Leslie works 40 hours/week with only a very modest stipend as compensation. She arrives each day with a smile on her face, ready

If you would like to let your community know about the BMRC, here’s your chance. Call or email Leslie and she’ll get you started. It’s easy and very rewarding! Leslie can be reached at 617.442.8917 x235 / leslie@bbmc.com.

to attack the next project. We are grateful to Leslie for her tremendous gift of time and talent and know that, at the end of her year of service, the BMRC will truly be a household name.

BMRC News

Fearful of High Fuel Bills this Winter?

Fuel Assistance Programs for Boston-area Residents

■ **Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program**

offers a one-time delivery of up to 175 gallons of home heating oil for one-half of the state-wide average retail price. The program is open to low-income, working poor, and elderly households, as well as anyone who is experiencing a sudden financial need due to a household emergency. For more information or to find out how to apply, call Citizens Energy at 1-877-JOE-4-OIL (1-877-563-4645).

■ **The Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance (Mass Energy)**

is a membership organization that offers discounts on home heating oil. For \$15/year, members will save 15-to-30 cents/gallon on their oil bill this winter. *(Note: Co-op members receive a one-time free membership.)* Mass Energy is part of a buying network that negotiates the retail mark-up of home heating oil with dealers, passing the savings along to its members. To find out more, log onto their website at www.massenergy.com or call them at 617.524.3950.

■ **The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development**

operates three programs to assist low- and fixed-income households with their energy needs — Heating System Repair or Replacement, Free Weatherization, and Fuel Assistance. To find out more about any of these programs, call 1.800.632.8175.

■ Administered by the Salvation Army, the **Good Neighbor Energy Fund** helps Massachusetts residents pay their utility bills, especially those in financial crisis who may not qualify for other means of fuel assistance. The Good Neighbor Fund is funded by utilities and utility customers across Massachusetts. To find out more, call the Salvation Army at 1.800.334.3047.

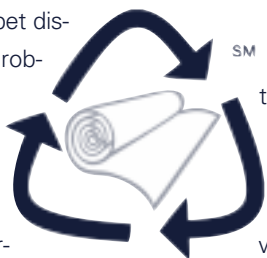
■ **The NSTAR Fuel Assistance Program**

offers assistance of up to \$1,100 toward eligible customers’ utility bills. Most Fuel Assistance clients also qualify for discounts on their gas, electric, telephone, and water bills. To find out more, call NSTAR at 800.592.2000 or visit their fuel assistance website at www.massfuelassist.com

BMRC Awarded \$20,000 Grant from Carpet America Recovery Effort (CARE)

By Matthew St. Onge

It's a given that carpet disposal is a serious problem in this country: unwanted carpet is clogging the waste stream and taking up disproportionately large portions of our landfills. One estimate is that in 2002, a staggering 4.7 billion pounds of discarded carpet passed through the waste stream and into our landfills!



centers — instead of thrown out with the trash.

With the project now well underway, concrete strategies for getting re-use centers and carpet manufacturers together, with the common goal of reducing the carpet industry's burden on landfills, are beginning to take shape.

The Carpet America Recovery Effort, or CARE, is a consortium of U.S. carpet manufacturers who have come together to address this industry-wide issue. Their first order of business: implementing a grantmaking program that encourages businesses to develop creative alternatives to the landfill for unwanted carpet.

The Building Materials Resource Center was selected this past June as one of three organizations to receive a grant from CARE's first grant-making cycle. In accepting the generous \$20,000 grant, the BMRC set out to develop strategies for increasing the volume of unwanted carpet that is donated to re-use

Fidelity Investments Donates 50 Kitchens

In April 2003, the Building Materials Resource Center teamed up with Fidelity Investments to salvage 50 kitchens from a Fidelity-owned apartment complex in Melrose, Pine Banks, as the complex was called, was scheduled for demolition in May.

To remove so many kitchens in such a short time, the BMRC put out an SOS to board members, friends, and tradespeople from the Boston Building Materials Co-op's Tradesperson Referral File. Not surprisingly, many stepped forward to help with the otherwise daunting task of disassembling, removing, re-assembling, and finally selling the cabinets, countertops, stoves, vanities and dishwashers to eager customers.

Our thanks go out to Co-op members and tradespeople Peg Preble, Christine Grimes, David Karaus, Frank Harris, and Edian Langa and crew, Board members Rex Passion, Marcia Peters, and Andrew St. John and son Tim, and BMRC member Raymond Borsman for all their hard work on the Pine Banks project. Special thanks to Andrew St. John for bringing Fidelity and the BMRC together in the first place and to our hardworking staff, who worked overtime to remove, transport, and sell all those kitchens!

BMRC Adopts New Buying Policy: High Quality Building Materials Now Available to the General Public, Special Discounts for Low-Income Buyers

In the summer of 2003, the BMRC Board of Trustees adopted a new buying policy. The new policy opened the Center to anyone, regardless of income, while continuing to offer special discounts to low and moderate-income individuals and families and nonprofits.

The specifics of the new buying policy are as follows:

- Anyone may purchase materials at the Building Materials Resource Center, regardless of income or anything else;
- Each item is individually priced. This price is the cost of that item for members of the general public;

- Low and moderate-income individuals and nonprofit agencies may purchase materials for 50% off the marked price. To qualify for the discount, individuals must demonstrate income-eligibility by providing us with a copy of their most recent tax return or Social Security Benefits Letter. Nonprofits must furnish us with a copy of their 501c3 IRS Determination Letter.

The Building Materials Resource Center receives donations of beautiful and very high quality building materials every day. Everything from doors, windows, and cabinets to sinks, lumber and tile. Come have a look. We think you'll like what you see.

Thus began large scale insulating of Boston housing stock AND the realization that people were hungry for information on improving their homes. The operation was managed out of a second floor walk up on Plympton Street in Boston's South End/Roxbury section, a rugged part of town back then, in a rather cramped, 20' X 20' office space, the BBMC's first home.

Limited space forced relocation in 1983 to Washington Street in Egleston Square, substantially increasing the Co-op's square footage. The extra space was necessary because the Co-op had by this time begun teaching homeowners how to build their own sash and interior storm windows. Other aspects of the Co-op grew as well, with larger in-stock inventory and pre-order hardware. Home-repair workshops were begun at this time. John also started the first newspaper drop-off recycle center in Boston, located at the old Boston Food Co-op in Allston. Soon after, the drop-off site became a source of raw material for cellulose insulation. John regularly collected the newspaper from the drop-off site and delivered it to the processor for conversion to cellulose.

The Co-op continued to grow and expand its products and

services. In 1986, facing a steep rent hike, the Co-op moved again, to Green Street in Jamaica Plain. Growing pains, space restrictions and the dream of a permanent home generated yet another move in 1989. This time the BBMC purchased a neglected, vacant lot on the back side of Mission Hill on Terrace Street, in an isolated area of Roxbury ignored by developers at the time.

With no building on the land, the BBMC leased a couple of office trailers out of which to operate. By day, John and fellow staff worked in the trailers, ordering supplies and giving out valuable technical assistance, while at night John was busy designing a new, passive solar building. By some combination of miracles and tenacity, the new building was completed in the spring of 1991.

The next period of Co-op history might rightly be called Chapter 11. As a result of some lean years, especially during construction of the new building, the Co-op was forced to file for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in 1994. (Chapter 11 provides the opportunity for an otherwise solid business to re-organize to alleviate debt that it simply cannot otherwise overcome.) While bankruptcy

A Special "Thanks" to John Rowse

John Rowse's role in the Co-op's germination, gestation and development can never be adequately described in words. The number of homeowners he has personally assisted over the nearly twenty years he was a part of the BBMC could never be counted. He never stopped believing in the neighborhoods of the City of Boston and the people who lived in them, even during some of Boston's bleakest years. He understood clearly that a city is only as healthy as it's neighborhoods and a neighborhood's well-being is based largely on its livability and pride of place. While many dedicated individuals have participated in the Co-op's success over the years, John's ever-expanding vision showed the way for the rest of us. On behalf of the collective BBMC community, thank you John.

is never a proud moment in an organization's history, the fact is most businesses never successfully emerge from it. This was NOT the case for the Co-op, however. Thanks to the steadfast support — both moral and financial — of BBMC members and the support of John Snellings of Nixon Peabody LLP, who generously provided pro bono legal representation, the Co-op successfully exited Bankruptcy in 1995 as a stronger, healthier business.

During and after bankruptcy, the Co-op's sales grew annually as new products and services were researched and developed. For example, in fiscal year 2002, kitchen cabinet sales represented 57% of all sales, due in large part to dependable service and expertise, two of the hall-

marks of the Co-op's success and longevity. In the spring of 2003 the Co-op introduced its newest product line — organic lawn and garden supplies — an extension of our long commitment to developing and promoting environmentally-friendly "green" products.

Throughout the years, the BBMC has shown that creative human energy can be used to conserve and reduce energy consumption and the costs they incur while simultaneously improving homes and neighborhoods. Fortunately, there is no final chapter to the Co-op's history. Each day, every one of our members continues to help us "write" the future.

was the Brookline-Quezalguaque Sister City Project. "Sister City" is a nonprofit group with a fifteen-year relationship with the town of Quezalguaque, Nicaragua (pronounced kay-sell-gwa-kay). Over the years the group has donated the materials and labor needed to construct the town's first health clinic, helped re-build roads and dwellings after a devastating hurricane, and provided ongoing medical, educational and food supplies. At least twice per year, groups of volunteers travel to Quezalguaque to distribute not only material goods but to fortify the human bonds that have grown alongside the building projects.

In the summer of 2002, a Sister City delegation spent three months, side by side with the local labor force, constructing the town's first library, the only one within a fifteen-mile radius. By November, much of the building was complete and the books were slated to be shipped by year's end. How to furnish the new library was one of several questions facing the group.

Time was tight when BMRC Executive Director Matthew St. Onge notified the group of the furniture's availability; Parson's desperately needed to move the furniture out of

the space it was occupying. In short order, Sister City located a truck and a few warm bodies and one very cold December night loaded up a multitude of chairs, tables, file cabinets, bookcases, and so on, each item meticulously labeled, itemized and, later, re-loaded onto a shipping container. Five weeks later it arrived in Managua, where it was met by BMRC customer and Sister City member Raymond Borsman. From there, it traveled 65 miles over narrow, winding "highways," finally pulling in to Quezalguaque in February 2003.

Today, Parson's donated desks and chairs, tables and file cabinets reside in Quezalguaque's new library, where Chacon and others come, most visiting a library for the first time in their lives.

While Quezalguaque and Boston are some distance apart, as measured by miles and language, culture and resources, that distance has grown a great deal smaller. The generous donations from Parson's Engineering, the work of the BMRC and all of the dedicated individuals both here and in Nicaragua have made this dream of a library and the belief in materials re-use a reality.

THANK YOU

The BMRC is grateful to the foundations and companies who supported our work with their financial and material gifts from January – June 2003.

(Note: Individual supporters are too numerous to mention in this newsletter! Look for a complete list in the 2003 Annual Report, due out in 2004.)

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Warren Custom Remodeling
Weiler Kitchen Design
West Hill Architects
Yale Electric



handsOn

HandsOn is the semi-annual newsletter of the Boston Building Materials Co-op and Building Materials Resource Center.

The Boston Building Materials Co-op is a member-controlled not-for-profit building materials retailer and technical assistance provider. Founded in 1978, we specialize in cabinets, counters, windows, and doors. We offer a range of affordable homeowner support services, including in-home consults, educational workshops, a Tradesperson Referral File, a lending library, and a Saturday morning window and screen repair clinic. You don't have to be a member to shop at the Co-op, though members get product discounts and other benefits. *If you are not sure of your membership status, give us a call to check!*

Contact the BBMC at:

100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
phone 617.442.2262 • **fax** 617.427.2491

email info@bbmc.com • **web** www.bbmc.com

The Building Materials Resource Center is the nonprofit spin-off of the Boston Building Materials Co-op. Founded in 1993, the BMRC is a building materials re-use project that accepts donations of new and used building materials and distributes them to homeowners, non-profits, and small businesses. Anyone may shop at the BMRC, with special discounts offered to lower-income individuals and families. Many of the homeowner support services of the Co-op — in-home consults, classes, window repair — are also available to BMRC customers, with a discount for income-eligible customers.

Contact the BMRC at:

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email info@bbmc.com

web www.bostonbmrc.org

Meg Perkins Ames, *HandsOn* Editor

The Building Materials Resource Center is a nonprofit building materials re-use project. Your tax deductible gift will help us divert perfectly good building materials from landfills and deliver them into the hands of needy homeowners and nonprofits.

Yes, I would like to make a contribution to the Building Materials Resource Center. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of:

\$500 \$250 \$100 \$75 \$50 \$35

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Please mail your check to: **Building Materials Resource Center**
100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
Thank you!

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