



handsOn

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

Fall 2004

An Enduring Partnership

By Leslie Hunt

Roxbury's Congregación León de Judá is flourishing, with more than 800 members from all over the Greater Boston. The church has been dedicated to the spiritual and social needs of the Latino community since its inception in 1983. Its membership includes representatives from nearly every Latin American country, from recent immigrants to those who have lived their entire lives in the US. León de Judá provides extensive programming and support services for all segments of its community, from youth groups to parenting classes to ESL training and much more.

Originally located in Cambridge, León de Judá's vision was to be better situated geographically to serve its Hispanic constituency. To meet that goal, the church purchased a warehouse on Northampton Street, in Lower Roxbury, in 1996. Given the acquisition of a building that had clearly suffered from neglect and disrepair, the congregation had, at the time, what Pastor Roberto Miranda described as a "modest and limited vision" of what could be accomplished. They certainly did not foresee the potentially huge costs that loomed ahead in proper rehabilitation of the building.

Fortunately, the congregation counts many dedicated and talented individuals among its members, folks who were committed to building the church a new home. From amidst these ranks stepped church member Mario Ulloa. Ulloa quickly "took ownership of the project," according to Miranda. One of his very first decisions as construction supervisor was to visit the Building Materials Resource Center.

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Restoring Window Sashes *(last of a 2-part series)*

By Don Malloy

The first half of this article (Hands On, Spring 04) dealt with costs and considerations regarding window restoration. Although restoration is often a realistic option, there are a number of conditions that warrant replacement rather than restoration. Perhaps the windows have deteriorated beyond repair; maybe lead paint is the overriding concern; or, perhaps it is simply time to upgrade to a high efficiency replacement window unit, which includes state of the art glazing, maintenance free materials, and integrated screen.

For homeowners going the way of restoration who need to replace only one or two windows, one popular choice is to duplicate the existing single strength sash, keeping the weight and cord set-up. (Due to Massachusetts Energy Code, this is available primarily to those replacing only a few windows, or when historical requirements take precedence). Most sizes are standard and easy to order.

[Note: One type of window this article will *not* discuss is a "new construction" window. This is used in large scale renovation, when everything has been ripped down to the studs, or in brand new construction. Replacement windows, on the other hand, are designed to fit into the existing jamb opening that housed the old window.]

Replacement Windows

All replacement windows have two features in common —

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Question:

How is the Co-op Different from Big Box Stores?

Answer: In some very basic, important ways.

Many of our customers have asked us how the Co-op is different from big box stores. We thought we'd share our perspective.

The BBMC is a member-owned consumer co-op.

- Our goal is to provide access to building materials at the best possible prices AND to provide home repair advice and support.
- We do not sell customers what they don't need or can't use AND we have the expertise to help them become educated consumers.

The BBMC doesn't always carry the least expensive materials, not when a cheaper price tag means inferior quality.

- We continually seek out sources for superior quality materials at affordable prices.
- We serve customers throughout the buying process — explaining correct measuring methods and various style and material options, even helping locate a contractor.

As with any consumer product, it's a good practice to price and quality-compare whenever you are shopping. However, be sure to compare like products. A vinyl window that costs \$100 may be very poorly made compared to one that costs \$200. Unfortunately, the higher price tag doesn't guarantee better quality either.

That is exactly why the BBMC is here: **to assist homeowners in locating the best materials for their needs and pocketbooks.** So, when you're in the market for home improvement materials, come to the Co-op, where you'll find high quality, expert service, and savings — all under one roof!

Product Highlights at the Co-op

Flex-Tech Epoxy

We continue to be amazed at the popularity of Flex-Tech, the high quality wood restoration material manufactured by Advanced Repair Technology. This easy-to-use product is a double, 2-part epoxy material designed to expand and contract with the wood. After removing all defective wood from the piece being restored, an epoxy primer is brushed on. Then a wood filler is applied. This material has a gel-like consistency and can be shaped and formed while wet, retaining its shape as it cures. After 24 hours it hardens and can be cut, sanded and planed. Designed for exterior and interior use, it is suitable for restoring doors, windows, sills, columns and more.

Coop Melt

Like it or not, it's time to think about Co-op Melt. When winter comes in the form of ice and snow, be prepared. Co-op Melt is a combination of **urea**, to break up ice and snow, and **sand**, to create traction and reduce slipping. Unlike other products on the market, Co-op Melt was specially designed to minimally impact the environment. It does not cause corrosion of metal or concrete like traditional toxic ice salts. Stock up on Co-op Melt today.

Awsco Vents

Many houses today remain underventilated. An attractive and functional product that helps solve this problem is a cedar or redwood gable vent manufactured by Awsco. These vents mount in the attic wall or window, come in a wide range of stock shapes and sizes, including arch-top, and include screening. Custom sizes are also available.

Storm Doors

An alternative to an aluminum storm door is a wood one. We carry "Easy Change" doors which come in a number of sizes and styles. They include glass and screen inserts, which can be easily swapped out seasonally. Although they require more maintenance than aluminum doors, many customers prefer wood doors for their more traditional look. They can be painted to match or contrast with the existing paint scheme of the house.

Spanish Cedar Parting Bead

We now carry parting bead made of Spanish cedar. It is a popular item both for its increased weather resistance and its warm reddish brown color. We cut the bead in our shop, so custom sizes are always an option.

IFCK: Injury Free Coalition for Kids

By Beth Ginga

In 2002, Children's Hospital, Boston became a local site of the national organization, *Injury Free Coalition for Kids* (IFCK). Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the community-oriented, hospital-based program supports efforts that include research, education and advocacy in the area of childhood injury prevention.

To carry out its mandate, IFCK joins forces with local

community groups, organizations and businesses to create collaborative programs of outreach and implementation. Based on community needs assessments, neighborhood demographics and hospital room treatment data, Jamaica Plain was selected as the target community for IFCK.

As those of us who read the daily newspapers are aware, children are susceptible to

injury and even death by falling from unprotected, open windows. The use of window guards is the obvious and seemingly simple answer to this danger. What then, IFCK wanted to know, are the obstacles to implementing this safety practice? In the case of window guards, installation was shown to be one barrier, particularly for low-income families. Not every parent or guardian knew how to install them (properly) and those children whose families could not

afford to hire someone to do it were most vulnerable.

Children's Hospital, Boston contacted the BBMC with some ideas about how the Co-op might help. The Co-op staff had the know-how to install the guards but not the staffing capacity to do the actual hands-on work. Home health care workers, on the other hand, regularly travel to their clients' homes and have an established, on-going relationship with them. *This is where partnership comes into play.* Through IFCK, the BBMC volunteered to conduct training sessions for health care workers, the people with the greatest access to homes of families with small children. Thus far two such sessions have been taught, in both Spanish and English, at the Martha Elliot Health Center. (Perhaps this is another good example of how the Co-op is different from big box stores, a question addressed in an article on the previous page).

The goal is to continue and expand these training sessions as well as monitor how many guards are sold and installed. The methods include the collaboration of many concerned organizations. The hope, of course, is an injury-free childhood for all children.

Storm Window Sale in October!

Your Window of Opportunity

**Now, you the homeowner
have a unique opportunity
to buy one of the best rated
storm windows available
— and at sale prices.**

When buying storm windows you need to look at a whole range of factors:

- **quality of construction**
- **price**
- **air infiltration rate**

The **Harvey Industries** Tru-Channel storm window is one of the top rated products in the industry and a favorite of contractors and architects.



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BMRC Graduates First VISTA Volunteer. . .

By Beth Ginga

Some people, it's been said, march to the beat of a different drum. BMRC Outreach Manager and VISTA volunteer Leslie Hunt has marched to the beat of many drums. The beat she first heard as a young adult took her to Nigeria, via the Peace Corps, where she lived, worked in the health sciences, met and married her husband, Dan Driscoll, and gave birth to their first child. Upon her return stateside, Leslie pursued her interest in microbiology, working for the Veterans Administration. Not long after, she heard the drumbeat of dentistry calling (don't ask me what that sounds like!) and entered Tufts Dental School at a time when female students were a rarity.

Over the next decade and a half, Leslie finished her dental training, added two more children to her family and, while practicing dentistry, took language courses on the side. That German class she took just for kicks happened to meet just before an archeology class, so she took that course, too. Next thing she knew, another drumbeat was leading her back to school, to another B.A., this one in Anthropology, so she could pursue her emerging interest in archeology, which she did, acquiring a Master's degree. Following graduate

school, Leslie stayed on at her alma mater, UMass/Boston, in the role of Managing Director of the Fiske Center for Archeological Research.

So, why VISTA and the BMRC? To try something "completely different." Leslie considers her year-long stint with VISTA a kind of "right parenthesis" to her earlier work in the Peace Corps. She appreciated being able to utilize her skills and training to help others in another country and culture and she wanted to do the same right here in her own backyard. Thus Leslie sought out a housing support type of organization where she would be able to contribute, to "give back," to her local community. (She and



Goodbye and hello: Leslie Hunt and Sara Harding

her husband, Dan, lived first in Hyde Park and then in Jamaica Plain for most of their life together, post Nigeria.)

It was the BMRC's good fortune that Leslie found us, joining our staff in August 2003.

BMRC News

Leslie's interests and skills proved an invaluable asset, bolstering our existing outreach programs and helping launch new ones. The warmth, intelligence and wit that Leslie brought to the office every day were just an added bonus.

Said Leslie, "One of the biggest challenges in joining VISTA is being able to divorce your sense of self worth from your paycheck, since there isn't one." (VISTA volunteers receive a stipend of \$986.00 per month while in the program. They are required to work full-time, including evenings and weekends, if needed, and may not hold down any other job). "For me, the sense of satisfaction I experi-

enced working with the BMRC was an even bigger pay-off."

Leslie's year long commitment ended in August. She is looking forward to moving on once again, to trying something new, to hearing the next drum roll. That will definitely include spending more time with her 6 grandchildren, two of whom arrived this past summer. With a small part melancholy and a large part gratitude, the BMRC staff bids a fond farewell to Leslie Hunt. Our best wishes go with her.

Postscript: It turns out Leslie's moving on doesn't involve her leaving the BMRC; she'll be staying on in her new capacity as BMRC Public Relations Coordinator, as well as doting on the grandchildren.

. . . and Welcomes the Next One

In August, the BMRC welcomed our second VISTA volunteer. Sara Harding comes to us after four years at Bentley College majoring in Marketing. Her desire to work in a non-profit venture and her interest in salvage and re-use made her a remarkable match for the BMRC. She will be with us fulltime for one year.

Women's Night 2004



It began with a simple observation — many of our customers at the BMRC are single head-of-households. Women doing home repair is hardly a novel idea, yet such an observation prompted us to ask ourselves “how can we better serve our customers?” Thus Women's Night came to be, a gathering of women tradespeople who make themselves available for direct, one-on-one questions from interested female home owners (and would-be home-owners). The result is a biannual event that has grown from a few dozen women the first year to more than 75 this past June, the largest number to date.

Here is a sampling of quotes from the evening:

“(I enjoyed) seeing so many women there interested in different issues of home repair and contracting.”

“Wonderful! Do it again! Thanks for the sharp women, good food and the safe atmosphere.”

“A useful source of info especially for women who are inclined to do things themselves.”

Both guests and experts were generous in their responses to a questionnaire distributed shortly after the event. While many of the responses were overwhelmingly positive, a number of participants gave us helpful feedback about how we could have done better. We intend to incorporate your suggestions for improvement to make the next Women's Night an even better experience for all!

Special thanks to Citizens Bank for their sponsorship of this event.

We Need You! (For Our Annual Appeal)

Unlike most nonprofits, the BMRC generates about 80% of its revenue from sales — the modest fees paid for donated materials by lower-income homeowners. While private foundations contribute as well, about 10% or \$50,000 comes from individual supporters like you. BMRC is a relatively small organization, so people like you who contribute annually really make a

big difference. *We thank you for past support.*

We appeal to our individual contributors just once per year. When you receive our holiday card, our hope is that you'll continue to partner with us to help needy homeowners and the environment too. Please respond as generously as you are able. *We thank you for your continued support.*

BMRC Expansion Project

In the last few years the Building Materials Resource Center has tripled the number of customers served to nearly 1,000 a year, and donations of building materials have greatly increased. We are happy to report on our new capital campaign to expand the warehouse, improve facilities, and upgrade our sales and information technology.

We launched the campaign in January and are already approaching our goal of \$200,000. We're pleased to announce grants from the following foundations: Jane's Trust and the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation, the Cabot Family Charitable Trust, the Tomfohrde Foundation, the Harold Whitworth Pierce Charitable Trust, Mellon New England and an anonymous donor. We plan to improve our technology this year and break ground for the addition early in 2005. Stay tuned for updates on our efforts to reach our funding goals.

Community Nonprofits — The “Other” BMRC Customers

Homeowners are not the only ones to benefit from the BMRC. Each year, between 40 and 50 small nonprofits also purchase low-cost building materials. Those materials are then put to use to help repair housing, homeless shelters, day care centers, churches, and other community buildings. Examples of recent nonprofit customers include:

Boston Projects Ministries	National Center for Afro-
Buddhist Association of MA	American Artists
Can-Do	New Canaan Church
Casa Myrna Vasquez	Rockwood Daycare Center
Christian Mission Church	Rosie's Place
Committee for Boston Public Housing	Shiloh Apostolic Church
Community Farms Outreach	Smile Preschool
Congregación León de Judá	Society of Islam
Deliverance Shiloh	Spanish Church of God
Elizabeth Stone House	Spiritual Baptist Corp.
Good Shepard Church	Teens Against Violence
Habitat for Humanity	Tree of Life Church
Home for Little Wanderers	Unitarian Church of Medford
Mt. Calvary Holy Church	Women in the Building Trades
	Women's Institute for Housing & Economic Development
	YouthBuild Boston

Since that initial contact nearly eight years ago, Ulloa has relied on the BMRC for an unquantifiable amount of the materials used in the León de Judá restoration project. Says Miranda, “The congregation provided willing hands in the form of professionals in the building industry. Together they worked to bring costs in line, using an unbeatable combination of human talent and low cost building materials.” Indeed, Congregación León de Judá is an inspired example of what can be accomplished when heart and hands (and low-cost building materials) are joined.

When Carolina Abolio and Americorps*VISTA volunteer Leslie Hunt from the BMRC visited the “church-in-progress” this past spring, Ulloa took them on a remarkable tour of the building, including the church hall, classrooms, offices, bathrooms and even a kitchen, all rehabilitated by materials donated to the BMRC. Among these improvements are carpet tiles that are compliant with fire regulations which can be found throughout the building on every level and in many rooms. Eighty percent of the carpeting is new. Shelving, cabinets, countertops, table-tops, lighting fixtures — all from the BMRC — are everywhere. Ulloa’s volunteer

Congregación León de Judá is an inspired example of what can be accomplished when heart and hands (and low-cost building materials) are joined.

flooring crew has laid down many types of wood flooring salvaged from tear-outs by way of the BMRC, re-using materials that were one fateful step shy of demolition and a landfill grave. The floors are spectacular, from the wide boards used on the altar/stage

heavy metal security door just off the stage area. Even the bathrooms use BMRC doors and partitions for each stall.

Ulloa is the consummate creative genius when it comes to turning building materials into second types of use, not

available at the BMRC, Ulloa bought them, realizing that he’d need them — someday. And so he did; he found the perfect spot for them when he installed them on either side of the altar, two years after their purchase. After all, he had to wait until the church was ready for them.



Dr. Roberto Miranda (left) and Mario Ulloa sitting on the new floor taken from a torn down house and re-used in the community room of León de Judá.

to the narrow, multi-colored complexity of the floors in the third floor Learning Center. The BMRC has also provided 90-95% of the doors in the church building. Especially noteworthy is the huge double door (91” x 76”) that serves as the main entrance and a

just second use. The altar area is ringed with wood panels made up of matching kitchen cabinet doors bought at a steal-away price and fashioned into a custom altar rail. When a set of four wooden-box ceiling light fixtures became

The BMRC has not been the only source of used building materials for the church. Other businesses have donated materials directly, e.g. an insurance agency donated sound dampening walls that surround the offices on the second floor. But the BMRC is the place Ulloa shops regularly since other sources tend to be one-time-only opportunities. Conversely, the BMRC provides low-cost building materials on an ongoing basis with new materials arriving at our warehouse daily, and we hope, well into the future. (See our article on BMRC expansion plans, page 5).

By the end of the visit, Ulloa and Abolio agreed that the relationship between the BMRC and Congregación León de Judá is “pretty much forever.”

insulated glass and “balances.” Insulated glass consists of two panes of glass with an air space between them, providing higher energy efficiency than single glass. An additional “Low-E” coating is often included, increasing the resistance to heat loss and insuring that the new window will meet or exceed the current Massachusetts Energy Code, a requirement of all replacement windows. “Balances” are the window tracking systems that are used in place of sash cords. They operate with a spring mechanism, rather than weights. These balances are generally “tilt-in,” allowing the homeowner to clean both surfaces of the glass from the inside.

Replacement windows come in two distinct styles. The first includes a set of balances and a separate top and bottom sash. Usually, they are wood or wood-clad sashes. Installation involves removing the original sashes, pulleys, and weights (at which time the weight box should be insulated). Next the balances are installed, usually held in place with a system of clips or screws. The sashes are then placed into the balances. The potential disadvantage of this system is that, while the new window is likely square, the existing jamb in old houses is often not. Custom fitting the new window is not an insurmountable problem, but one which may require a

more advanced skill level, and possibly additional tools, such as a hand or power planer and/or a table saw.

One solution to this challenge is to avoid it altogether by purchasing the other type of unit, which is not just a set of sashes and balances, but is made with a complete new frame as well. In essence these units function as new construction windows, except instead of tearing the old window apart down to the studs, you get to “cheat” and use the old jamb opening as a rough opening. All vinyl replacement windows are made this way. At least one manufacturer (Harvey) makes a wood window, clad with aluminum, which is also built in a replacement “box.”

An advantage of these complete units is their relative ease of installation. Because the window has been manufactured complete, the only fine tuning needed prior to installation might be some shimming of the entire unit. The tilt-in feature is also smoother than the sash and balance system. Because most replacement window units are vinyl or have aluminum cladding on the exterior of a wood sash, exterior maintenance is greatly diminished. A half or full screen is included in the design as well. (There is no room for a storm window with this design, so it must be removed.) These windows reduce direct expo-

A Word About the Window Works

One of the myths regarding insulated glass is that it is not possible to replace it if it breaks. This is incorrect. Replacement glass is typically easy to order and we routinely make repairs of this type in our shop. Another misconception is that insulated glass loses its seal and fogs up between panes. Such failure nowadays is rare, as the technology for sealing glass has advanced. Also, most manufacturers offer a 10-year warranty for seal failure. Another frequent concern is that the balance mechanisms degrade over time and stop working. To minimize these potential problems, we recommend buying a window with a “block and tackle” balance mechanism. They are far superior to other spring systems. If somehow damaged, they can be replaced as well.

Homeowners should also be aware that reproducing the multiple pane look of original windows, known as “divided lights,” is more of a challenge with insulated units. For example, if the original windows had six small panes over one large pane, the new insulated unit would typically have a simulated version of this pattern. This is accomplished in various ways by different manufacturers and can add a little or a lot to the overall expense of the unit.

sure to old painted surfaces, so they are also a popular solution to lead paint concerns.

There are some disadvantages to these windows. Their look is different from that of traditional windows. Intermixing new replacements with old windows does not typically enhance the outside view of a house. Another criticism of these units is that they reduce the overall available glass size. This tradeoff is a result of the fact that the old window is not ripped out to the studs but just down to the jamb opening. A new replacement, including new sashes, enclosed in a framed box, installed in the same opening that previously

only housed a set of wood sashes, reduces the overall daylight opening slightly.

The Co-op sells a range of high quality window options, both replacement and new construction. We also have the experience and expertise to advise you in your window decisions. Come by and see all of these products on display, or call us for ideas. Casement, awning, hopper, bay, bow, and sliding windows are also available.

Don Malloy is Shop Manager and Window & Door Specialist at the Co-op. Look for other helpful “Ask Don” tutorials on a range of subjects on our new BBMC website at www.bbmc.com.



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!*

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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.

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Beth Ginga, *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 _____

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Please mail your check to: **Building Materials Resource Center**
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