



handsOn

Fall 2005

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

Baby, It's Cold Outside!

By Bradford E. (Brad) White

When the weather is still warm, thoughts of heating our homes are usually far away. But we're all too aware of the recent fuel price increases, and colder weather is coming quickly. What's a homeowner to do?

My first inclination as an HVAC engineer may not be what you would expect. Your heating system is important, sure, but when I advise homeowners who want to save money, the first thing I will look at is the home itself: walls, windows, roofs, and doors.

Are the walls insulated as best they can be? Do windows have well-fitting sashes and storm windows, and are they tight? Does the attic or roof have insulation? Do the doors have weather stripping, a door sweep, and maybe a storm door? Are the gaps between these disparate surfaces caulked to keep cold

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Free!

weatherization Open House

Saturday, November 12 • 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Watson Hall, Wentworth Institute of Technology

Before soaring gas and oil prices drive up your heating bills, come to our Weatherization Open House. Learn how to seal up drafts in your home, find information on fuel assistance programs, and sign up for an energy audit. **Free money-saving information and giveaways!** For details, contact Carolyn Lewenberg at 617-442-8917 or visit www.bbmc.com.

BMRC Helps Izetta Boakarie Realize Her Dream

By Leslie Hunt

Perseverance has been the hallmark of Izetta Boakarie's efforts toward ownership of a single-family home — a goal that was realized with plenty of help from the Building Materials Resource Center.

Izetta found out about the BMRC shortly after buying her first home, an affordably priced three-family in the Egleston Square area. The brick structure had good bones, but needed much cosmetic work. A friend introduced her to the BMRC, and soon she was coming regularly to improve her own unit and those of her tenants.

Born in Monrovia, Liberia, Izetta came to Boston at age 13. From the time she started bagging groceries at age 16,



Izetta's artsy powder room sink is from the BMRC.

she has never been without a job or a dream to become a property owner. Izetta would often use her lunch hour at her job in Jamaica Plain for short visits to the warehouse. "The difficult part was being patient, believing that in the end, it would be worth the wait to find those materials that would be just right for my home," she recalled.

After adopting a toddler boy and his baby sister in 2001,

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Bon Voyage, Florence

The Co-op bid farewell to Florence Hagins, chairperson of the board, when she moved to Florida this fall. She received hearty thanks for her years of service to the board from Matthew St. Onge, Co-op president, and other members who attended at the annual meeting in May.

Button Up Your House

Energy prices are up and temperatures are going down — so now is the perfect time to think about energy-conserving products to help button up your home. The following items are available at the Co-op (member prices listed):

Programmable thermostat.

Keep your heat low while you're away for the day or sleeping and program it to warm up at the time you return or wake up (from \$53.00).

Tyzell interior storm

windows. Seal your drafty windows without obscuring your view or stressing your budget (\$7.00).

High-temperature fiberglass pipe insulation.

Prevent heat loss from your pipes if you have a hot water or steam heating system (call for price).

Door kits.

The Co-op's own door kits are an excellent choice for keeping out the winter drafts (\$10.50).

Bronze weather

stripping. This hard-to-find weather stripping comes in rolls of 100 feet (\$49.75) or 17 feet (\$8.25).

Is Your House Breathing Properly?

Having enough ventilation in your attic is key to preventing structural damage that can be caused by moisture. Water vapor can condense in an inadequately ventilated attic, causing rafters to rot and mildew to grow. Roof shingles can buckle and insulation can lose its effectiveness. And when it snows, an attic that is too warm can lead to those dreaded ice dams.

The American Society of Home Inspectors recommends checking to see whether your attic ventilation is adequate by doing the following:

- Place a thermometer in the attic on a warm, windless day. Is the temperature more than 10°F to 15°F warmer than the outside temperature? If so, better ventilation is needed.
- Inspect your attic from time to time during the winter. Do you see any signs of condensation, such as moisture, rot, or mildew? If so, consider increasing the ventilation.

There are many different options for helping your attic — and your whole house — to breathe better. Through the Co-op's technical assistance program, someone can visit your home and suggest solutions that make the most sense for you.

Don't Slip Up!

Pick up some Ice Melt

This winter, make sure you have enough of the Co-op's Ice Melt on hand to keep your walkways clear. Our own blend of urea and processed sand is environmentally friendly and won't damage your lawn or pets' paws. Members pay just \$6.20 for a 25-pound bag.

New Co-op Board Members

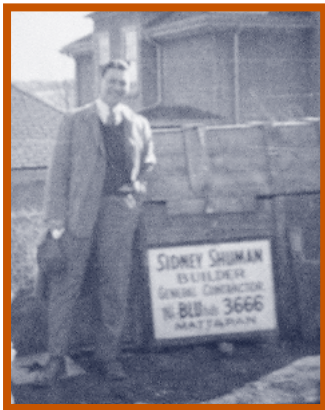
Three new members joined the Boston Building Materials Co-op Board of Directors in October. Interior designer Darlene Donovan of Roslindale, architect Cecil Hansel of Fort Hill, and woodworker Milton Trimitsis of Roslindale will bring their perspectives and expertise to the organization. Welcome, all!

“Retoiled” Gate Pays Tribute to Tradespeople

By Patti Hudson

The Boston Building Materials Co-op and Building Materials Resource Center have a new entryway: a gate topped by an arch created from tools once worked by hands that built structures in and around Boston for more than 50 years.

Barnette (Bunny) Shuman of Newton donated the tools of her late father Sidney Shuman, a stonemason. “My father’s motto in life was ‘Always be prepared,’” she said. The arch was crafted by Mission Hill sculptor Morris Norvin of Stonybrook Fine Arts and funded in part by the Mission Hill Main Streets storefront improvement program.



Sidney Shuman built many structures around Boston, beginning in the 1930s.

When Bunny’s grandfather Barnet Shuman came to Mattapan from Russia at the turn of the last century, he

brought the sturdy skills and work ethic of a plasterer turned bricklayer already acclimatized to cold and often unpredictable weather. Then in 1936, after Barnet suffered a heart attack, his 19-year-old firstborn son Sidney completed the unfinished construction jobs, including an icehouse that is still standing on Mass. Ave. in Roxbury, across from the NSTAR entrance.

Though still a teen, Sidney started running the business. Barnet saw that his son’s work ethic was as solid as a rock (a prerequisite for bricklayers!), and that he was undaunted by rain, snow, sleet, heat, or hail. These attributes would make the Shuman Construction Co. a trusted name in the Boston area building trades for the next 50 years. During those times, prevailing wages for tradesmen ranged from \$1.75 per hour for a common laborer to \$2.90 per hour for a bricklayer.

In the days before the Weather Channel, Sidney Shuman took no chances. An extra set of outdoor clothes could always be found in the trunk of his car or behind the seats of the green Shuman Construction truck. Sudden rainstorm? No problem. A good worker has



Morris Norvin, center, helped take the wraps off the arch he created from the Shuman family tools to top the BBMC and BMRC gate.

his rain gear at hand. A drop in temperature? Don those extra socks and gloves. Bunny recounted that once when she was working at an event at Boston University, the skies filled with clouds, a rainstorm on the way. Her boss, knowing of her father’s habit of carrying extra rain gear, asked if there were ponchos and slickers in her car. Indeed there were, in true Shuman fashion.

Sidney’s younger brother Stanley recalled that Sidney had his tools stolen from a job site once when he was just starting out in the trade. Unable to afford to lose them a second time, Sidney slept at the site until completing the job — the chapel at Zviller Cemetery in West Roxbury.

Both Sidney and Stanley worked at Shuman Construction on such projects as water pumping stations, sewage treatment plants, sophisticated concrete structures, and single-family homes. The

signature brick style of eight of the New England Telephone buildings is the work of Shuman Construction.

The Shuman brothers also dedicated themselves in volunteer service to organizations such as Associated General Contractors, Massachusetts Building Congress, Cement Masons Health and Welfare Fund, Society of American Military Engineers, American Arbitration Association, buildings and grounds committee of Beth Israel Hospital, Massachusetts Laborers Pension Fund, Congregation Mishkan Tefila of Chestnut Hill, and more.

Now on display as part of the Boston Building Materials Co-op and Building Materials Resource Center gate, the Shumans’ tools will bear witness to the fact that strong and sturdy individual efforts can lift and move communities for the common good.

BMRC Welcomes New Board Members

Brett Kass of Natick and Lori Krasner of West Roxbury are the newest members of the Board of Trustees for the Building Materials Resource Center. Brett is a project engineer at Turner Construction and an expert in green building. Lori brings experience in human resources as well as a passion for reuse of materials to benefit both homeowners and the environment. We give them a hearty welcome!

Staying Warm When Money Is Tight

By Mike Weber

Winter is coming, and heating bills are rising. Here are some places that can help low- and moderate-income homeowners and tenants keep warm on a tight budget.

■ Action for Boston

Community Development (ABCD) Fuel Assistance Program

operates from November 1 through April 30. This federally funded program helps low-income, elderly, and handicapped residents in the Boston area with heating expenses. Discounted rates for gas, electricity, and telephone are applied for eligible recipients. Call 617-357-6012, ext. 6640.

■ Administered by the Salvation Army, the **Good Neighbor Energy Fund** helps pay utility bills for Massachusetts residents, especially those in financial crisis who may not qualify for other assistance. Call the Salvation Army at 1-800-334-3047.

■ Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program

offers a one-time delivery of up to 175 gallons of home heating oil for half the statewide average retail price. The program is open to low-income and elderly households, as well as those with financial need due to a household emergency. Starting in January, call 1-877-JOE-4-OIL (1-877-563-6012, ext. 6640).

■ Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance (Mass Energy)

is a membership organization offering discounts on home heating oil. For \$15 per year, members save 15 to 30 cents per gallon. Mass Energy is part of a buying network that negotiates with dealers, passing the savings along to members. Call 1-800-287-3950.

BMRC News

■ 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. Call 1-800-632-8175.

■ **NSTAR Fuel Assistance Program** offers assistance of up to \$1,100 each toward eligible customers' utility bills.

Most clients also qualify for discounts on gas, electric, telephone, and water bills. NSTAR also offers free energy audits, in which an NSTAR representative will come into your home and provide suggestions on how to lower home energy use. Call 1-800-592-2000, option 6.

■ **United Way** offers a referral service for fuel assistance programs at 1-800-231-4377.

Refer a Friend to the BMRC

By Michael Weber

How can you save even more money at the Building Materials Resource Center? By telling your friends about it!

Starting this fall, BMRC customers can receive a coupon for 15 percent off their next purchase (with a maximum value of \$15) by referring a new member or customer to the BMRC. When your friend comes in and makes a purchase from the warehouse, he or she will need to provide us with your contact information. Then we will call and let you know that you can pick up your coupon the next time you shop. All you have to do is spread the word!

Resource Center Sample Products

The array of products on sale at the Building Materials Resource Center changes every day. Here are a few items recently on display in our showroom that are typical of what you'll find. Stop by soon and have a look around!



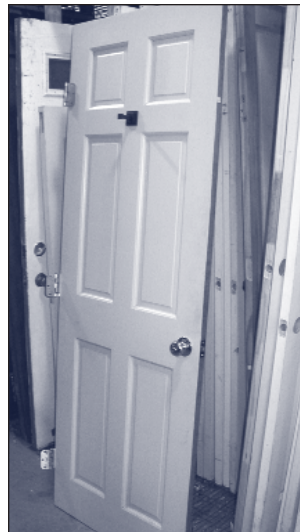
◀ *Twelve-piece white laminate cabinet set, eight wall and four bases (\$1,200 nonmember, \$600 member)*



▲ *Composite, molded one-piece sink top, chrome faucet, and plywood vanity with painted veneer, 29-7/8" wide, 30-1/2" high, 18-7/8" deep (\$150 nonmember, \$75 member)*



▲ *Ceramic drop-in sink with faucet and stopper, 19-1/2" wide x 16-1/2" deep (\$20 nonmember, \$10 member)*



▲ *Pine interior door with metal hanger and locking doorknob, one surface primed (\$60 nonmember, \$30 member)*



▲ *New Pella 45° bay window, wooden interior and exterior, 79" wide x 50" high (\$750 nonmember, \$375 member)*

"I didn't know the Building Materials Resource Center needed donations of money as well as materials."

We wish we had a nickel for every time we've heard this sentiment expressed by a customer or by one of our donors of materials. But the fact is that because we keep our prices low to stay affordable for low- and moderate-income customers, the money we make from sales of materials accounts for about three-quarters of our operating expenses. The rest must be raised by asking our friends for monetary gifts.

If you support the BMRC's dual mission of helping people to improve their homes and communities while diverting usable building materials from landfills, please consider making a financial contribution. Your support will help us to remain a strong organization for today's homeowners, and for new home buyers who will need the resources for home maintenance and improvement tomorrow. Thank you!

Thanks to our Generous Donors!

The following people and companies recently made significant donations of materials to the Building Materials Resource Center:

- Olive Darragh — two kitchen sets with appliances
- High Point Interiors — pallets of tile
- Jones Payne Group — acoustic replacement windows
- Jonathan Leffel — cabinets, appliances, granite countertops, light fixtures, and more
- Preston Mason — mahogany windows and an assortment of other items
- Metropolitan Cabinets and Countertops — several new cabinet sets

- North Shore Kitchens — directed several clients to donate cabinet sets
- Jirair Ostayan — new windows, doors, and tile
- Philips Medical Systems — six pallets of carpet tile, culled, stacked, and wrapped
- Roma Tile — pallets of tile
- Saulnier Floors — new wood flooring
- Lewis Savolino — pallets of tile
- Alex Shulman — cabinets and more
- Van Millwork — custom moldings and doors
- Wolfer's Lighting — several pallets of new lighting
- Yale Electric — pallets of lighting left over from a clearance sale
- Amy Zastawney — red oak spiral staircase and other items

air out and warm air in? Are necessary penetrations for dryer vents and kitchen range hoods sealed and have dampers?

Unless the house envelope is at its personal best, and unless your heating system is on its last legs, there is little point in spending time taking a look at your boiler or furnace. That would be like being in a leaky boat and ignoring the leaks while trying to make your pump work better. Fix the leaks first. For the purposes of this article, I will assume we are dealing with an existing house, probably an older one — maybe even yours.

Air infiltration is the biggest heat thief. Imagine how much heat rushes outside when your front door is open. You could empty your house of heat in about 15 minutes. When the door is open, why would heat take the long way out through your walls and roof?

But if you close that door, do you think you are keeping it all in? Think again. The total effect of all the cracks around chimneys, electrical outlets, piping and wiring, windows, doors, and building joints, not to mention the *very skin of the building itself*, can equal that of one or more open windows. Caulking and storm windows are essential. If you're re-siding, use an air barrier such as

Tyvek or Typar, making sure it is properly applied and taped under your siding. Think of these barriers as windbreakers for your house.

The attic or roof is the next big heat loser. This also involves air leakage, so that is where you should start. The so-called "chimney effect" means that hot air rises and seeks the easy ways out via cracks in ceilings at walls, chimney openings, and attic hatchways. And to make matters worse, the air that leaks out the top floor draws cold air in at the bottom floors.

Let's pause a moment to explain some of a heating engineer's vocabulary. A *BTU* is a British Thermal Unit. A wooden kitchen match produces about one BTU. A *therm* is 100,000 BTUs. This is the unit used to measure natural gas purchased, and represents the fuel input into a boiler or furnace. *R-value* is a measure of insulation's resistance to heat flow. The higher the R-value, the better an insulating material is able to retain heat. The simple way to explain R-value is through the following question: How many square feet of wall, roof, or floor will it take to transmit one BTU per hour, per degree Fahrenheit temperature difference? (OK, maybe only heating engineers ask themselves these things.) But the thicker the insulation — the higher the R-value — the more

area it will take to transmit a given amount of heat. With thinner insulation, less area will lose the same amount of heat.

When insulating a bare attic, insulation specialists and savvy homeowners know to go around the attic and seal all gaps around the toilet vent stack, wiring paths, and other fixed openings with expanding foam. Operable openings such as hatchways should have bulb gaskets or other forms of weather stripping. A double door system may also be of benefit — a pull-down ladder cover with an insulated top-hinged hatch into the attic. A layer of six-mil polyethylene insulation up over joists and down between them is an effective vapor barrier. Where the house is older and attic joists are not particularly "standard spacing," a blown-in material like modern cellulose or short-fiber fiberglass is recommended. Rake or blow this evenly to at least the depth of the joists. Then blow another six or eight inches over the top.

In my own house, I blew in enough cellulose to cover the joists at the suggestion of a friend. I had already bought enough rolls of fiberglass insulation to cover the attic crosswise in two directions. In the end, I installed both layers crosswise on top of the cellulose. Net effect: an R-value of 75, meaning that half of a person's body heat cancels out the roof heat loss in a bed-

room. (You emit about 200 to 240 BTUs per hour into a room, you know. More if on a treadmill. Much more.)

In summary, when weatherizing a house, priorities based on effectiveness against the greater losses are as follows:

- Seal air leaks; install storm windows where there are none. Use caulking, expanding foam, and weather stripping in doors and windows.
- Seal the attic floor as described above, then insulate. Add a second layer of insulation perpendicular to the first.
- Insulate the walls. Blown-in insulation can be expensive, but worth it. If you are re-siding anyway, it gets easier.
- If re-siding, install a thorough application of an air barrier, taped and sealed. Seize the opportunity!

Once all of the above is done, we can look at the Monster in the Basement, your home heating system.

Brad White is a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) consultant. A Boston Building Materials Co-op member for more than 20 years, Brad teaches a workshop on heating systems, "The Monster in the Basement."



Beauty in Building Materials

Dancing Bannister, created by Winchester artist Madeleine Lord, was the winner of the BMRC's July artist competition, Beauty in Building Materials. All entries were composed entirely of used building materials from the BMRC warehouse. Judges included television host and producer Fernando Bossa, Julie Brandlen of the Boston Nature Center, Ross Donald of Home Depot in West Roxbury, and Josh Wood of Joan Wood Architects.

Izetta Boakarie continued from page 1

she became even more determined to achieve her next goal: finding a single-family home. She took this step in February 2004 when she and her family moved into a three-bedroom colonial in Milton.

As she had in Egleston Square, Izetta began remodeling, but this time with the help of a talented carpenter and handyman as she could afford to pay for each job. Many of the necessary materials were there and waiting, purchased at the BMRC well in advance. For example, a large, dark-colored piece of BMRC granite sat in her cellar for almost two years until she could begin the countertop phase of her kitchen project. A dark-gray designer lavatory bowl kept it company until placed in her newly renovated powder room. Her BMRC

chases have included wood, flooring, windows, kitchen and bath materials, and more.

Izetta stresses the importance of patience and planning ahead. The BMRC offers many building materials that she knows she could use, and the selection is constantly changing. "It would be easy to take my eyes off my goal if I see something great that I know isn't what fits into my total plan," she said. "And it would be silly to think that just because what I want isn't in the warehouse today, it couldn't be there in the next week or two."

Constant, patient searching has also made it possible for Izetta to stick to her budget. "I used to come to the BMRC more than once a week, sometimes several times, and I still check in because I am not finished with my home," she said. "It's important to have a picture in your mind or on paper that will keep you on track."

Discount Zipcar Memberships

Up-to-date members of the BBMC or BMRC can join Zipcar for just a \$25 annual fee, instead of the usual \$175. Car use rates are between \$8.50 and \$12.50 per hour (\$60 to \$90 for 24 hours), and include gas, insurance, and parking. If you only use a car occasionally, Zipcar is an option that could save you some money while decreasing the number of cars on the road and benefiting the environment. Visit www.zipcar.com/bbmc-bmrc for details!

zipcar
where's where you want to drive



Mailing Mix-up

Due to some database misbehavior, the mailing labels for the last issue of *Hands On* had the wrong names associated with our recipients' addresses. Please accept our apologies. We hope you still found the articles informative, even if it felt like you were reading someone else's mail!



handsOn

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

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Deb Beatty Mel, *HandsOn* Editor

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.

Contact the BBMC at

100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120-3418
phone 617.442.2262 • **fax** 617.427.2491
email info@bbmc.com
web www.bbmc.com

The Building Materials Resource Center is the charitable affiliate of the Boston Building Materials Co-op. Founded in 1993, the BMRC is a building materials reuse 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.

Contact the BMRC at

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email info@bbmc.com
web www.bostonbmrc.org

The Building Materials Resource Center is a nonprofit building materials reuse 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 **Thank you!**
Building Materials Resource Center
100 Terrace Street, Roxbury Crossing, MA 02120-2491

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