Hiring a Handyman or Contractor

BY RUTH BERNHARD-DREISS

I wrote this article 6 years ago and this is in the nature of an update. During the last few years, we learned of horror stories occurring in building associations because unlicensed persons were hired to do jobs, resulting in removal of retaining walls and cases where the upper floor has either moved or completely fallen. A licensed contractor should be hired, and show his credentials and scope of work to the building association board, who will approve or disapprove it. Some jobs require the vote of a percentage of the membership or the entire membership.

Every now and then, you may need a little help with repairs and maintenance around the house. I have hired my share of handymen over my 53 years living in Century Village and Cypress Lakes. At some point, every home needs a handyman and we single ladies who don't have spouses with the tools or knowledge to do the job, or single men who don't know what a hammer is, must look to those who do. That's when we need to hire a handyman.

For the record, not all handymen are carpenters, electricians, or plumbers. Some confine their efforts to general outdoor maintenance, instead of indoor home repairs. We Century Villagers are fortunate to have our building associations' maintenance companies handle that work. You need to ask yourself whether the job you want done is within the handyman's abilities. When you have outlined what you need done, don't throw in surprises along the way.

Henceforth, whenever I refer to a handyman, it will include a "handywoman," as well. The contractor I hired years ago, had a woman install a water heater for me and she did an excellent job.

Neither UCO nor I recommend hiring an unlicensed, uninsured handyman or contractor. In the long run, this is for your protection. With unlicensed/uninsured persons, you have no recourse if things do not go right. There is no one to turn to. A workman should be bonded, as well. The importance of being licensed, bonded and insured is that if someone is working on your property and becomes injured, unless they have their own liability insurance, you will be liable. As I prepared this article 6 years ago, a "handyman" decorated our association bulletin board with no fewer than 13 business cards, spread across the board, advertising just about everything in the way of services … .but no license and no insurance. You run a risk when hiring unlicensed persons and the County cannot approve a job if you use unlicensed people. Your association should always be included under the workman's insurance and if he uses helpers, they should be covered for workmen's compensation.

Search local resources for reliable workmen – daily newspapers and our own UCO Reporter. UCO takes ads only from licensed advertisers or companies, and requests their license numbers on our contract with them. When you have chosen a handyman or contractor, check the license and insurance. Ask for referrals for work performed. It is important that you make a list of the work you need done. There should be a work guarantee or work warranty, a written estimate and a business card. A well-established professional handyman or contractor is proud to make himself known in the community.

Request cost estimates for both labor and materials ahead of time. Are you comfortable with how they price their work? Do they expect to be paid by the hour? Are they willing to be paid by the job? This needs to be settled before work starts, especially before supplies or parts are ordered. Hold to a schedule agreed upon, so that the workman doesn't disappear for a length of time to do another more profitable job.

A contract in writing is proof if the handyman doesn't hold up his end of the bargain and with that proof you can take him to court, if the need arises. Include in the written contract all guarantees or warranties of workmanship. Are permits needed? If so, the handyman/contractor should be the one to obtain them. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no such thing as a standard contract. Each contract is unique to the project it represents….no blank spaces, including N/A for anything not applicable. Changes during the contract should be reflected via changes to the contract.

So, to recap:

1. Check out license
2. Check out insurance and bond
3. Ask for referrals from previous work performances
4. Get a work guarantee/work warranty
5. Professional written estimate and business card
6. No blank spaces in contracts when you sign

Beware of anyone who does not have a "brick-and-mortar" location and real phone number. The lowest estimate is not always best. The best is one that uses the highest quality materials and is most cost-effective overall. Always remember, you usually get what you pay for.

Century Village 1994 and Now

BY RUTH BERNHARD-DREISS

I recently came across a Century Village Guide published 31 years ago in 1994. I found it fascinating because I lived in Century Village at that time and many years before, and recognized many changes. The majority of the businesses that were operating in the area then are gone now.

Unfortunately, many of the UCO officers and Executive Board members mentioned in the Guide are no longer with us either. Having lived in CV for almost 54 years, I knew all of them and volunteered alongside them and am still in touch with a former VP who no longer lives in CV.

Back "in the day", there was a beauty salon and barber shop in the Club- house. Today there is a salon in the Medical Center, plus a doctors' offices and a real estate center. Anyone living in CV long enough, will recall the Chiffon Bakery, Eckerd Drugs and Secor Bank, all located in Drexel Plaza across from the West gate on Okeechobee Blvd. There was a thriving supermarket at the corner of Military and Okeechobee Blvd.

Some things remain the same, such as UCO Delegates' meetings which are held on the first Friday of each month at 9:30 am in the Clubhouse auditorium. In 1994, the auditorium/theater contained 1,002 vs. 1,220 seats today because the entire Clubhouse was renovated after Hurricane Wilma.

In 1994, the UCO office was located adjacent to the Camden pool. There were 19 committees vs. 24 or more today. While there were the same number of officers then, the Executive Board consisted of 28 members – 14 board members and 14 Alternates. Today our Board consists of 20 equal members. Camden was a busy location with the UCO Reporter operating there also. I would become Editor-in-Chief 24 years later.

TV was serviced by Tele-Media Cable and residents could watch 42 channels and 4 optional premium channels. UCO is now in the middle of a 10-year contract with Breezeline which enables us to watch hundreds of channels. Bus transportation was available to all residents at a building association assessment of $8.00/month vs. today's cost of double that amount. Buses were available only for local shopping and area doctor offices. Excursion trips were not available until later and then abandoned this year. The cost for Auto Decals/Barcodes was $1.00 vs. $10.00 today.

The UCO Reporter was composed of 3 Co-editors, a 5-member Editorial Board, a Production Manager and an Editorial Staff of 11 members and 3 assistants. Advertising consisted of 4 members with 4 members tending to the business/financial portion. There were 2 photographers on staff, 4 artists and 3 members in charge of Circulation. The UCO Reporter was then, and still is, the official newspaper of UCO for the enlightenment of the residents of Century Village. Its secondary purpose was to serve as a source of entertainment and information to the residents, but primarily information. The content of the paper was decided by its editorial board. Back in 1994, all stories, articles, etc. had to be typed or neatly printed for submission. With computers, a much smaller staff is able to handle production of the paper in a fraction of the time it took then. However, since Covid, there is a staff of one and that one is yours truly, managing to produce the paper in the office and at home, and contract for some of the ads. The majority of the ads are handled by an ad person on the west coast of Florida where our printer is located and the paper "cranked out" monthly.

The only things that have not changed in 25 years are our map and our telephone number! The building associations are still where they stood then and the phone number is still 683-9189. And still of major importance is the UCO Reporter. It was our best source of information then, as it is now.