



THE HOLTON RECORDER'S

Fall FIX-UP SECTION

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 19, 2016



(Top photo, left to right) Brian and Karol Bell of Bell Plumbing are shown with their associate Roger Breshears. (Photo above) On a recent morning, Brian Bell laid the groundwork for plumbing needs at a new construction site.

Recorder photos

Bell Plumbing an important Holton business for 48 yrs

By Brian Sanders
The plumbing business is all in the family for Brian Bell of Bell Plumbing, a Holton fixture for nearly half a century.

"It kind of got passed along to me. It wasn't my dream, but I kind of fell into it," Bell joked.

But Bell — along with wife Karol and business associate Roger Breshears — continues to keep the water running, and draining, in Holton-area homes, something the business has been doing ever since his father, Roy Bell, started the business in 1968.

"It's been a good business for a long time," said Bell, who took over the business in 1987 after his father's death.

Bell said he got started in plumbing working with his father in a great deal of "on-the-job training," as well as some formal training before he and Breshears took and passed their master plumber's license examinations.

"There was a lot of studying involved in trying to get that test passed," Bell said of

the master plumber's license. "But that's about as high a designation as you can get in plumbing."

Today, Bell and Breshears offer "full-service plumbing" from their business, including residential and small commercial work. They also sell a wide range of plumbing products and accessories, such as North Star water softeners, Bradford White water heaters and Delta faucets.

"We do a lot of water conditioning also," Bell said. "We perform service repair and we work with new and remodeled houses — all-purpose stuff."

On a recent morning, Bell could be seen laying the groundwork for plumbing needs at a new construction site south of Holton, prior to a cement floor pour.

With fall arriving and winter on the way, Bell advises homeowners and renters with outdoor water faucets to remember to disconnect their garden hoses.

"A lot of people forget and leave their hoses on

during the winter," he said. "We get a lot of service calls in the spring when they use them for the first time, because their lines will break and they won't know it until they use them."

Bell Plumbing is located at 417 E. Fifth St. in Holton. They can be reached by telephone at 364-4434.

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Index of Advertisers

Aeschliman Construction	2
Al's Overhead Door Service	2
Arnold's Refrigeration	5
Bell Plumbing, Inc.	1
Chiles Upholstery Service	2
Danny's Car Care	3
Denison State Bank	3
Don Ash & Son	1
Dragonfly Yoga	5
Edwards Innovations	4
Envista Credit Union	4
Eubanks Custom Woodworks	1
Grass Roots Lawn Care	2
Ground Source, Inc.	5
Haug Construction Co.	3
Holton Farm & Home	2
Holton National Bank	6
Holton Tire & Service	1
Homestead Affordable Housing	5
Ireland Custom Exhaust	6
Jayhawk TV & Appliance	4
Kyle's Construction	3
Lovvorn Brothers Body Shop	6
Mark's Overhead Door Service	3
McManigal Electric	2
Modern Air of Topeka	1
Morton Buildings	6
Phat Matt's	4
Riley Electric, Inc.	5
Sawyer Custom Building & Remodeling	5
Seneca Furniture	3
Sutherlands	1
The Farmers State Bank	5
The Holton Recorder	4
Topeka Landscape	2
Traditional Heating, LLC	3
Watkins Mower Care	4
You Name It Handyman	6

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Older homes need lots of TLC

Older properties tend to have a sense of charm that newly built homes may lack. Perhaps it's their lived-in feel or design elements that remind homeowners of yesteryear that make older homes so popular among home buyers.

What older homes have in character they may lack in modern amenities. For example, whereas many homes are now built with energy efficiency in mind, older homes may not be so eco-friendly.

Fortunately, there are many ways for homeowners who love their older homes to keep that love going strong while making their homes more energy efficient at the same time.

The Jackson County community has several expert businesses in this field. Many are listed in this special section.

Here's some things to do:

*Check for leaks and plug any you find. Homes

may develop air leaks over time, and such leaks allow air to infiltrate the home.

When that occurs, homeowners instinctively turn up the thermostat in winter to combat the cold air getting in. Come summertime, those same homeowners will run their air conditioners on a higher setting in an effort to stay comfortable when hot air is creeping through the cracks.

Rather than adjusting the temperature inside, fix any sources of air infiltration you find. Run your hand along doorways and windows to determine if any drafts are coming through. Older homes may also develop cracks in bricks, around the foundation and in siding or stucco. Seal any areas where you feel air infiltrating your home, which will save money, reduce your energy consumption and make your older home more efficient.

*Add insulation. Many

older homes are poorly insulated. But according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, adding insulation can reduce energy costs by as much as 50 percent.

Installing insulation can be tricky, especially if insulation was not originally included in your home, as is sometimes the case with older homes. Insulation can become damp and prove ineffective if installed improperly. Damp insulation also may contribute to mold growth and rot in the home's framing.

Older homes may be lacking adequate insulation around attics, crawl spaces, basements, heating and cooling ducts, and water pipes. Cover your water heater with an insulated water heater blanket so the heater retains more heat and consumes less energy to heat the water.

*Stay on top of your home. Much like older vehicles, older homes re-

quire a little extra TLC on the part of homeowners.

Don't allow your home to fall into disrepair. Even if your energy bills are not on the rise, inspect windows and doors to make sure they are closing tightly, as over time such seemingly minor problems can add up to substantial energy loss. Don't forget to clean gutters and downspouts, removing debris that can add up and lead to water damage that may ultimately compromise the effectiveness of your home's insulation.

*Book an energy audit. Energy audits, which may be offered free of charge by your utility company, can help detect any additional areas where a home may be using energy inefficiently. Even if you have to pay for an audit, the cost savings if any additional inefficiencies are discovered will likely add up to more than the cost of the audit.

Watch for trouble signs in your driveway

The average cost of a driveway installation last year was about \$3,700, it has been reported.

Those costs are influenced by a host of factors, including the size of the driveway and the material it's made of.

Damaged driveways do not necessarily need to be replaced, as some may just need minor repairs. But homeowners who see any of the following trouble signs in their driveways may want to consult a professional contractor in the Jackson County area to determine what their next steps should be.

*Potholes might be most often associated with heavily trafficked roadways, but even driveways are susceptible to potholes.

As the ground beneath the driveway expands and contracts, the pavement above that ground weakens and becomes more susceptible to damage.

That damage may ultimately lead to large chunks of the driveway breaking down, creating holes as a result. Homeowners who live in areas that experience heavy snowfall may see their driveways develop potholes after they are shoveled or plowed. Potholes that are not fixed may damage vehicles that drive on the pavement, and potholes may even expand over time.

*Puddles that form and accumulate during a rainstorm may not be indicative of anything other than a rainy day. But water that pools or runs down the middle of the driveway may indicate drainage problems.

Such problems may be the result of structural problems with the slope of the drive-

way, which can cause bigger issues down the road.

When water is not absorbed into the ground or directed away from your home, it can then flow into the house, potentially making your garage or home susceptible to water damage.

*Cracking is one of the more noticeable issues that can plague driveways. Many driveways experience cracking as materials inevitably succumb to the elements.

Driveway cracks may develop for various reasons, including poor initial installation. Tree roots that grow beneath the driveway surface may also contribute to cracking as the driveways ultimately succumb to the pressure created by the growing roots.

Some cracks may prove less problematic than others, but homeowners should still speak with a local contractor if they notice their driveway is starting to succumb to cracks.

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Page
3



Part of the driveway on the east side of the Jackson County Courthouse, shown above, has been replaced this fall.
Photo by David Powls

Air leaks waste energy, spike costs

Rising energy costs coupled with the continued adoption of eco-friendly lifestyles are two factors driving homeowners to seek ways to reduce energy consumption in their homes, it has been reported.

Reducing energy consumption is reason enough for many homeowners to make changes around the house, but saving energy sometimes means saving substantial amounts of money as well.

Energy-efficient appliances and eco-friendly building materials can help homeowners reduce energy consumption. But homeowners looking for additional ways to cut cooling and heating costs can address air leaks around the house to make their homes more energy efficient. For expert assistance, contact a local expert company in this field.

*Identify air leaks around windows and doorways. Autumn is a great time of year to identify air leaks. Fall, and particularly late fall, tends to be characterized by cold air that makes it easy to detect air leaks.

Feel for leaks around windows and doorways, ideally conducting such tests on cold, windy days when you can quickly detect if air is

flowing in from the outside. Leaks around windows and doors waste energy because the interior of the home is either colder (in the winter) or warmer (in the summer) than it needs to be, prompting homeowners to turn up their thermostats or rely more heavily on air conditioning units.

*Look for leaks elsewhere around the house. While windows and doorways are where many leaks are found, leaks also may be found around plumbing, electrical fixtures and dryer vents. Inspect such areas by feeling for drafts or looking for signs that insects and critters might be entering.

*Look up and down. Evidence of air leaks may be noticeable on both the floor and the ceiling. Dirty spots on carpeting and the ceiling may be indicative of air leaks at interior wall/ceiling joints and wall/floor joists. Fixing such leaks may be as simple as applying some caulk.

*Go with gaskets. The United States Department of Energy recommends installing foam gaskets behind outlet and switch plates on walls. Outlets and switch boxes on exterior walls provide another place for air to leak into a home and drive up energy costs. Properly in-

stalled gaskets can cut back on air infiltration, providing an inexpensive way to save energy and money.

*Cover the kitchen exhaust fans when you are not cooking. Kitchen exhaust fans can help prevent fires and unfavorable indoor air conditions when preparing meals at home. But such fans provide opportunities for air to enter a home, so make sure they are tightly closed or covered when no one is cooking in

the kitchen.

Air leaks around a house can waste energy and contribute to high energy bills, particularly during the winter and summer when temperatures outside tend to be at their most extreme. Homeowners looking to reduce their energy consumption and save money can inspect various areas of their homes for air leaks and immediately address any they discover.

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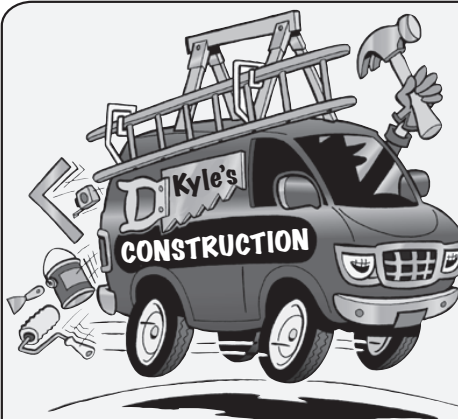
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WEDNESDAY, OCT. 19, 2016

Page
4

Shopping for a new car loan? Do homework before the buy

New automobiles and pickups are expensive these days.

Many drivers now take out loans when replacing their existing vehicles, it has been reported.

Such loans make it possible for drivers to purchase new vehicles they may not have the cash to buy outright, and making car payments on time each month is a great way for consumers to build their credit.

Drivers want to find great deals on their cars, but they also should make an effort to secure the most consumer-friendly auto loan they can find. Doing so can save drivers substantial amounts of money over the course of their loans, and finding a great deal is not as difficult as it may seem.

It pays to do business with lending institutions that you know, trust and can build a long term relationships with.

Here's some things to remember:

*Go to your lender first and foremost. Loan shopping before car shopping, as opposed to relying on dealers to arrange the loan once you

find a car you want, can help drivers secure better terms a lot of times, it has been reported.

By prequalifying for a loan, consumers can then go to the dealership knowing exactly how much they can spend, saving themselves time and easing nerves some buyers may have about the car-buying process.

Prequalifying with a bank or credit union does not lock buyers into those terms, leaving them room to secure even better deals by asking the auto dealer to beat the terms of their existing financing deals.

Be careful not to apply for too many loans when loan shopping, as each application may lower your credit score.

*Clean up your credit. Creditors take many things into account when determining loan terms, but perhaps no variable is more important than an applicant's own credit history.

If your credit history is bumpy or you are currently carrying substantial debt, pay off as much of your debt as possible before applying for an auto loan.

Even if your credit history is

not great, you may be in line for better loan terms if you have paid off your consumer debt and recently indicated you are capable of making monthly payments for an extended period of time.

*Comparison shop. Lenders compete with one another, and consumers can use that to secure the best possible loan terms. If one lender gives you loan terms that you find attractive, resist the temptation to sign on the dotted line right away. Sleeping on it and taking the terms to the lender's competitors or even auto dealers may ultimately result in you landing even better terms.

*Know the terms of the loan before you drive off the lot in your new ride. Some financing terms may be classified as "contingent," which means the terms can change even after drivers take cars off the lot. That may mean higher interest rates or lengthier loans, which can cost drivers considerably more money in the long run. Drivers can avoid that fate by waiting until the terms have been finalized to accept the car and take it home.

Get your credit in shape

Many people use credit when making large purchases. That may entail using a credit card or financing a purchase via an installment loan rather than purchasing an item outright.

To make buying on credit as consumer-friendly as possible, people must ensure they are in good financial standing, which can help them get lower interest rates so they pay less for an item than they might if their finances were not in the best of shape.

Here's some tips:

*Get your credit score. A credit score, also known as a FICO score, is a number between 300 and 850 that is calculated based on your payment history, outstanding balances, length of credit history, new credit, and types of credit. You local bankers can help you with this information.

Lenders look at this credit score to determine how great a risk you present as a borrower. Whenever you use credit to make a purchase or apply for a loan, your credit score will be checked. The higher the credit score, the more attractive you are to lenders and the lower your interest rate figures to be.

*Check for credit report inaccuracies. If your FICO score seems low, there may be mistakes on your credit reports. You can request a copy of your credit reports from the following three main credit reporting agencies - Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. Look over the reports thoroughly and address any mistakes immediately.

*Make sure you have a credit history. In an effort to avoid debt, some people never apply for credit cards or other lines of credit. But having no credit history can hurt you, even if you never accumulated any debt.

For example, when applying for a mortgage, you will be asked to show at least three lines of credit (any combination of credit cards, student loans, car loans, and so on) that have been active within the past 12 to 24 months, according to the resource Credit Sesame.

If you have no credit history, apply for a few credit cards and use them regularly, paying off the balance in full each month to maintain active credit and improve your score. However, do not try to establish lines of credit too close to when you're making a large purchase, as doing so within six months of making your purchase can temporarily lower your credit score.

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Reduce travel challenges: Prepare

Roadways, railways and skies tend to get busy come the holiday season, when millions of people across the globe travel to visit family and friends.

Wherever travelers are headed, be it across the country or across the world, they should realize that many other people are traveling as well. That can lead to traffic, long lines and other side effects associated with large crowds.

But before travelers let the idea of challenging travel conditions deter them, they can consider certain ways to make the process of getting from point A to point B a bit more manageable.

Travel by car

Those traveling by automobile will have a few extra steps to take to ensure their trips go off with minimal disturbances.

One of the more important steps is to ensure the vehicle is properly maintained prior to departing. Have the car checked

by your local mechanic and take care of any service appointments, such as oil changes or tire rotations.

Map out the route in advance and have an alternative plan if the route chosen proves to be too congested. One idea is to choose a scenic drive that may be a little longer but has less traffic. In addition, account for rest stops or points of interest that can break up the trip. Apps such as GasBuddy can help drivers find the cheapest gas or the cleanest bathrooms along their routes.

Bring along plenty of snacks so you can eat healthy and aren't forced to rely on foods you otherwise would not eat. This is particularly helpful with keeping kids satiated. Plan for a few treats along the way so that everyone traveling has an end goal, such as an ice cream or a souvenir.

Traveling by plane

One of the key things air trav-

elers can do to make holiday traveling easier is to avoid peak travel dates. Whenever possible, avoid traveling the day right before the holiday, which tends to be the busiest and most expensive. Remember, weekends tend to be more harried and expensive as well, particularly when the holidays fall in close proximity to a weekend.

Weather is a gamble in many regions of the world during the holiday season. Develop a contingency plan just in case foul weather delays or cancels flights. It's much less stressful to put plan B into motion than it can be to rush around trying to make new, last-minute plans.

Always shop around for the best rates, but also the best at-

mosphere. It may be wiser to fly out of a smaller airport where crowds will be thinner and delays less frequent, or you may prefer a larger airport that's closer to home and offers more amenities.

Another way to avoid delays is to pack minimally. Ship gifts and even travel essentials ahead to your destination, and only bring carry-on bags aboard the plane. This helps travelers sail through security checks and avoid the crowds at the luggage carousels.

Holiday travel requires planning, patience and having alternative plans in place so that everyone can make it home for the holidays.

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THE
HOLTON
RECORDER'S

SECTION

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 19, 2016



Morton Buildings has been serving Holton and all of northeast Kansas for 46 years. Current employees include (from left) Randy Ward (sales), Frank Williams (foreman), Michael Sawyer (job coordinator), Devin Russell (crew), Ben Schmile (foreman), Harper Snyder (crew), Jacob Davidson (crew) and Steve Harshaw (crew). Not pictured is Darrel Meyer (manager) and Rita Cordell (construction center administrator).

Submitted photo

Morton Buildings in 46th year

By Ali Holcomb
Morton Buildings has been in business in Holton for 46 years, and according to local office manager Darrel Meyer – who has worked for the company for 45 of those years – “it’s not going anywhere.”

Morton Buildings is the largest post-frame, steel-covered building construction company in America, and the company first set up an office just south of Holton in 1970.

Started by a family in Morton, Ill., the company was originally founded as the Interlocking Fence Company in 1903. The company sold mail order supplies and wire link fencing.

In 1949, IFC built its first building, which was a machine storage structure for farm use. In June 1965, the company was renamed Morton Building, and the business now includes more than 120 sales offices/construction centers throughout the country, as well as six manufacturing plants.

“When I first started working for Morton, the market at that time was primary for farmers – farm machine sheds, cattle barns, grain stor-

age and other farm-orientated buildings,” Meyer said. “But over the years, when farming was having a tough time, the company branched out and changed the design of the buildings and moved into offering commercial buildings. Right now, I would say the farm business is not even 50 percent of the type of buildings we construct now.”

Meyer said that the company has been erecting more commercial-type buildings for churches and offices.

“What’s really big right now is ‘shouses’ (a house made from a shed). Their home shops with living quarters in them,” he said. “I think about 80 percent of our daily calls are inquires about them.”

Meyer said that ‘shouses’ have risen in popularity because of the way they are insulated and the fact that they are maintenance free.

“We’ve been doing a lot of interior subtracting on these types of projects,” he said. “A lot of people are looking for alternative types of housing.”

Meyer said that crewmembers travel throughout northeast Kansas for projects.

“We have a written, docu-

mented warranty on all our buildings for material and labor,” he said. “The paint we use is top of the line. It will not peel, chip, crack or fade, and we use stainless steel screws.”

Each office has its own territory, and the employees from the Holton office borders the Chillicothe, Mo. office on the east, the Salina office on the west, the Lincoln, Neb. office on the north and an office in Clinton, Mo. to the south.

The Holton office runs two crews and employs two sales people, a project coordinator and an office manager for a total of 12 employees.

Meyer said that it only takes crewmembers a day and half to build a garage compared to four to five days for a 60-foot by 100-foot machine shed.

“We’re working on a church in Leavenworth that will take us well over two months to build,” he said. “Right now, if somebody bought a building, we’d be looking to erect it in February.”

Nov. 19 will mark Meyer’s 45th year with the company in Holton, and he said he plans to retire at the end of the year.

“As a company, Morton Buildings has continued to grow since I started,” he said. “They recently started expanding to the west coast. It would be a good time for somebody wanting to start a career and get on the ground floor of this expansion.”

Meyer started his career with Morton Buildings as a crewmember and then was promoted to foreman where he worked for six years before moving into sales. In 1978, he became manager.

“My story is a bit uncharacteristic because most people have to move to another office to get promoted,” he said. “For me, everything has kind of fallen into place for me here.”

Meyer said that the Holton office relocated just north of Holton, to its current location at 2006 Frontage Rd. in the industrial park, in 1993.

Morton was the first business in the industrial park, which helped the city of Holton receive a grant to develop that area.

For more information about Morton Buildings, call 785-364-4177 or visit www.mortonbuildings.com.

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