Home Energy & Improvement

YOUR GUIDE TO THOSE FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

INSIDE

1540 Ventnor Road 2

Word burning is back 4

Winter living oasis 9

Ice storm memories 10

Shop Locally

Preparing your home for winter

Fall is here, and it's time to get your home ready for the long, cold winter months ahead.

"Canadians spend significant time and money preparing their homes for winter," says George Hughes, Manager of Home Improvements, Enbridge Home Services. "Our goal this fall is to help homeowners out, with energy-smart ideas and affordable solutions," he says.

A sister company to Enbridge Consumers Gas, Canada's largest supplier of natural gas, with 1.4 million customers in central and eastern Ontario, Enbridge Home Services is Ontario's source for trustworthy advice on maximizing your home comfort through timely upgrades and preventative maintenance.

Winter Home Improvement and Safety Tips

Improving your home for winter can be a huge investment and Enbridge Home Services is pleased to offer the following tips.

Eliminate drafts

Tip: Replace your exterior doors

"Steel doors are three times more efficient than wood, because they reduce energy costs by eliminating drafts," says Mr. Hughes.

Here are some important considerations when you invest in new exterior doors:

Weather stripping effectively seals the cold out in much the same way your refrigerator door seals cold in;

A steel door is a lot more secure than an old wooden door;

Decide if you want a peephole, before finalizing your purchase;

Most side lights are triple paned so they're nearly as energy-efficient as the doors them-

Please turn to page 9

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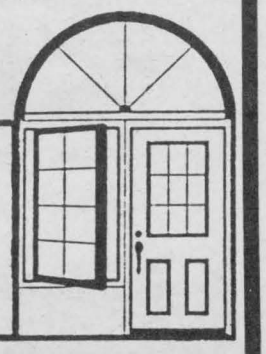

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Welcome to 1540 Ventnor Rd.

by Barbara Brunzell

In 1877, the Presbyterian community of Ventnor, Ontario, would be blessed with a new church; 120 years later Fred Ford and Susan Gaumont would become the first people to privately own this sacred property, transforming it into a beautiful and unique dwelling.

When the couple took possession in the summer of 1996, the building still looked as it did when people used to gather there in fellowship many years before. Ford had had some experience with renovations in the past but never a task quite so intimidating. Fuelled by his passion for stone buildings, however, he was prepared to accept the challenge. "When we stripped out the pews and took out the altar," Gaumont recalled, "we were left with four walls, ten windows, and a stone exterior with a roof on it... there was no wiring, no plumbing, nothing." The tree in their backyard would prove a poor substitute for a toilet. "When it came November," Gaumont laughed, "I came in and said to Fred, we can't use our washroom anymore ... because there's no leaves left on it." Gaumont proclaims that Christmas Eve as the most glorious day of her life. After months of no running water, she would finally be able to take a hot shower.

For 9 months, 18 hours a day, both Ford and Gaumont worked diligently to create the beautiful surroundings they now enjoy. At times the tasks before them seemed almost impossible, but every time they were ready to throw in the towel, a neighbour or two would show up at the door, hammer in hand. "That's truly, truly, the hospitality of Ventnor," Fred smiled, "the people in this little hamlet are absolutely exceptional."

The end result of Ford and Gaumont's hard work is quite remarkable. Their choice of building materials is part of what gives it such charm. The couple hand-picked stones to create an enchanting courtyard filled with flowerbeds, vines, perennials, and rose bushes. Arbors constructed from the church pews add a touch of history.

A grand foyer with double French doors makes a spectacular first impression. The original pine and hemlock floors underfoot add a comforting familiarity to the open concept living room and dining area. Natural light cascades into the room from the seven-foot high gothic arched windows that line

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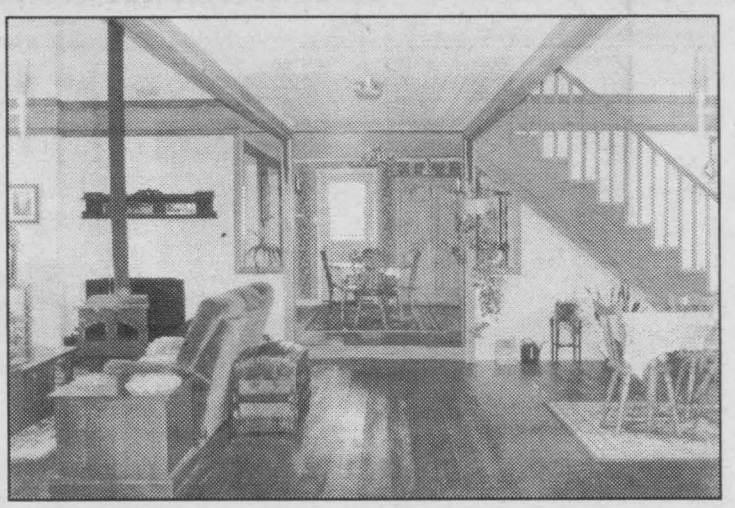

Open concept living

This view of the inside of 1540 Ventnor Road shows off the original pine and hemlock floors. The staircase, built from church pews, leads to a 29-foot bridge that adjoins the master's quarters to a spacious loft style office and library.

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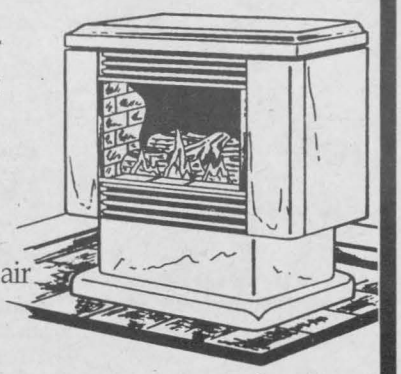

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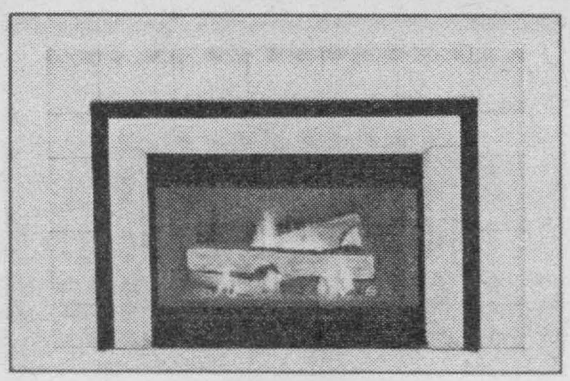



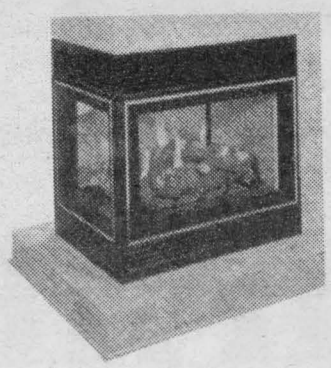

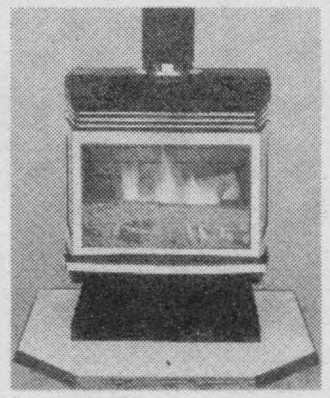

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Burning wood for heat is back

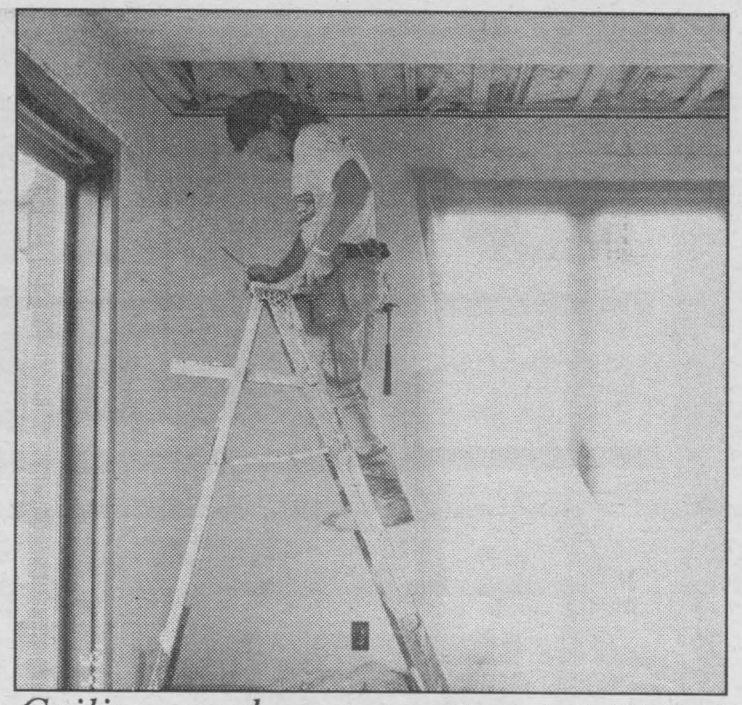
Advanced technology has moved wood-burners out of the basement into the living room as Canadians return to wood as a source of heat in their homes. About 20 per cent of Canadian single-family homes now rely on wood either as the primary or secondary source of heat, a sharp reversal of the post Second World War trend when homeowners turned to other heating methods.

Wood began looking attractive again in the 1970s when price and supply of other fuels caused anxiety. Changes in the design and effectiveness of the wood-burning systems have also contributed to the revival with attractive units now designed for main living areas.

The trend back to wood is expected to continue as more advances are made in both technology and appearance. Two types of stoves which are expected to grow in popularity burn either pellets or wood chips.

The pellets are formed from biomass waste and are expected to become more readily available as the need to dispose of these wastes increases. Fed to firebox from a hopper, the pellets can provide heat for several hours without tending.

Wood chip-burners are likely to become more common for heating commercial buildings.



Ceiling work

Chieftain photo by S.L.Johnston

The new gyprock is in place, all but one piece and the taping will be next. Then the undercoat will go on and the final spray.

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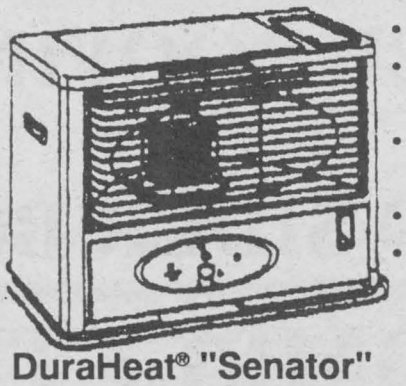

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On The Home Front



BLEACHED BUT NOT OUT

From early fall through to spring, the wood burning fire place is used continuously in our household. Our problem is we get unsightly dark patches on the masonry around our hearth. We used a cleaner once and it tended to bleach out the area too much. Any suggestions?

A A generous amount of baking soda, water and a good stiff brush works best.

HOLIDAY BOUQUET SAVER

I'm fortunate to receive fresh–cut flowers regularly, but can never get them to last more than a couple of days. I'd be really interested in any suggestions to keep them looking good, longer.

A Try using bleach. It will prolong the life of fresh cut flowers and stop the water from stagnating so quickly. Use 4 to 6 drops of bleach for each litre of water.

DUCT SPOT CHECK

I've always been skeptical of duct cleaning services. How can I tell if the job really needs to be done?

A A home that needs dusting habitually is usually a good indicator. Do a spot check in the cold air return access vent using a long vacuum attachment. If you pick–up reams of dust it's probably time to take action. Check references and compare quotes before signing anything. This isn't a job for the do–it–yourselfer.

NO BUTTS

We have a non–smoking policy in our home, but when I was away for a week my husband bent the rules when his friends came over for their annual poker extravaganza. Our house smelled like an ashtray when I got home. To deal with it I tried this tip a neighbour once gave me — placing an open bowl containing two cups of vinegar in the rec room. It worked beautifully . . . the smell of smoke was gone by the end of the day.

A Great but we suggest you don't share this tip with your better–half.

XMAS LIGHT TIME SAVER

Now in his early '70s, my Dad came up with a quick and less precarious way of installing outdoor Christmas lights. Using a staple gun, he mounted the lights on to lengths of 1" by 2" cedar strapping. When it's time to put the lights up, he simply hangs the strapping from hooks screwed into the eaves. It all folds away for easy storage.

TIP OF THE WEEK

Our vinyl flooring has a textured finish and is normally very difficult to clean, demanding a lot of scrubbing to get even marginally good results. Recently, as I was cleaning my windows, I accidentally spilled the contents of a container of Windex on the vinyl floor. I wasn't able to clean it up right away due to a phone call, but when I finally was able to wipe it up, I found the area where the spill occurred was much cleaner than the rest of the floor. This "accidental" cleaning action was far superior to what I get using a scrub brush.

Sounds like the perfect theme for our next "On The Home Front" Tips Contest ... If you know of novel, non–advertised uses of glass cleaners or ammonia–based home cleaning recipes, send them in to us for a chance to win $50. Mail your ideas care of: On The Home Front, Spryfield R.P.O., Box 20280, Halifax N.S. B3R 2L1

Check your home for leaks and drafts this fall

Check Windows and Doors

It's a good idea to start with a thorough check of your windows and doors. Cracks around these areas can let in chilly drafts while letting valuable heat out. You can check for drafts quite easily by holding up a feather or a piece of tissue paper suspended by a hanger to the areas where you suspect there may be leaks. If the feather or tissue moves independently, you've located a draft.

To solve this problem, you can caulk or apply weather stripping. These can be purchased at your local hardware store under a wide variety of product names. If your windows or doors are in extremely poor shape, you may want to think about replacing them altogether with energy-efficient alternatives. Also make sure there are no drafts coming in around your power outlets. These should be properly insulated as well.

Synthetic Foams

For large gaps or holes, there are several varieties of synthetic spray-foams that you can buy. A small amount is squirted into the gap, and it expands to fill the hole. Excess material can then be removed. This dense filler is an ideal way to insulate around difficult, hard-to-reach areas. When using any of these products, be sure to read the manufacturer's instructions and follow them carefully, because some substances can irritate skin and eyes.

Check Basement

Conduct the same draft test on all floors of the home - including your basement. And while you're down there, check around for any cracks or holes in the foundation.

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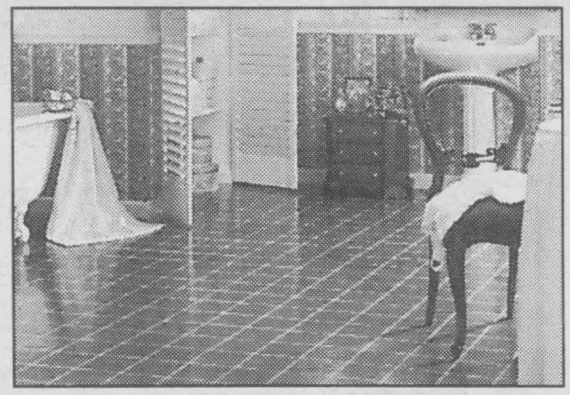

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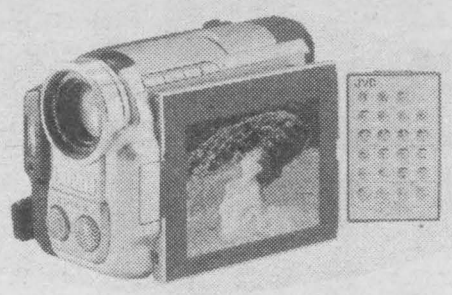

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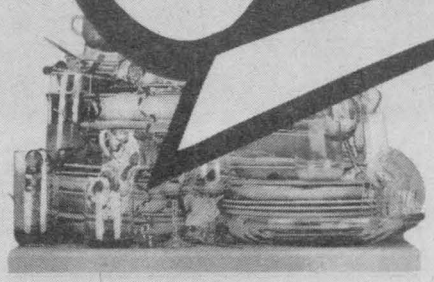

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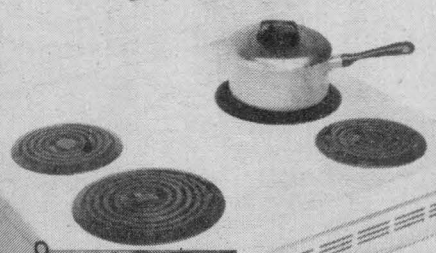

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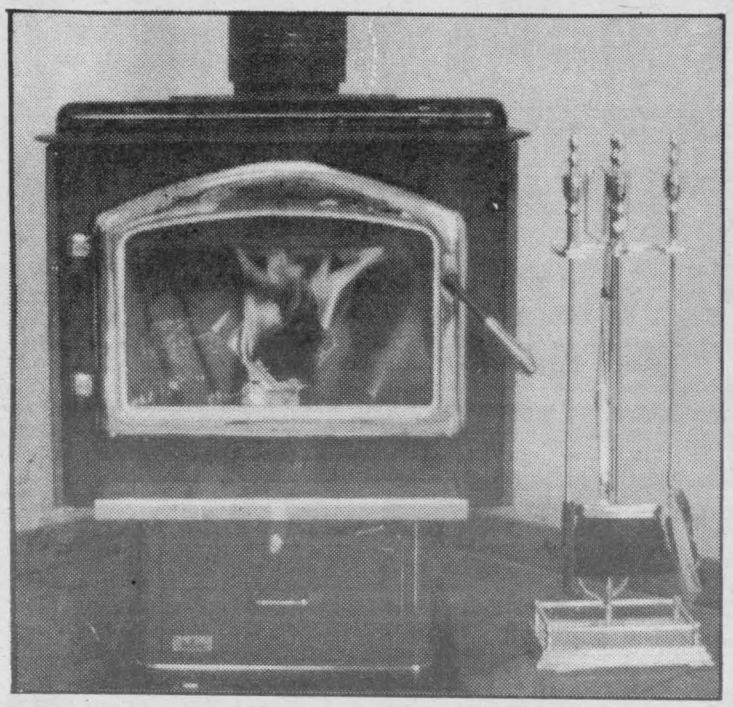
Can't remodel this year? ...consider an upgrade

Rather than a complete kitchen remodeling, consider upgrading your kitchen instead. With a "kitchen upgrade," you can make your kitchen more attractive and more useful by replacing all or some of your existing appliances with today's better-looking, more useful ones.



Snuggle time *Chieftain Photo by S.L.Johnston*

The warm glow of a fire, the snapping and crackling of the wood can provide solitude and comfort for the homeowner who seeks a lifestyle that allows a break from the daily pace of the workworld. Know what to look for when purchasing a stove and be sure it is correctly installed.

An upgrade can be done on a smaller scale than kitchen remodeling, with or without the need for architects or interior designers.

For example, it could mean upgrading from a conventional coil electric range to a smoothtop model. The new smoothtop models not only dramatically improve the kitchen's appearance, but they also make cooking and cleaning up easier. Or it could mean new cabinets, counters, or all new appliances.

If you should require design assistance, take advantage of professional kitchen designers at your local kitchen showroom.

Expect to spend at least a month shopping and learning about the appliances that appeal to you. Start a folder. Visit home shows, open houses and dealer showrooms.

Ask your friends what they like or don't like about their appliances. Look for articles and advertisements. Pick up brochures. Write for information. Compare prices and services of various stores. Set up a budget and put money aside.

Think carefully about which appliance features you actually will use. Generally, the most worthwhile features are those that save time by making cleanup easier, such as glass shelves in the refrigerator, self-cleaning capability in ovens, or glass-ceramic smoothtops on ranges or cooktops.

In fact, one of the major features propelling the popularity of smoothtop ranges is their ease of cleanup. With none of the nooks and crannies for spills to hide in, they clean up easily and quickly.

While smoothtops are relatively new in this country, they've been popular in Europe for nearly two decades. The glass-ceramic panel and the specially designed heating elements underneath the panel have proven very durable. American manufacturers offer a wide variety of models with smoothtops with different surface decorations that are compatible with any kitchen decor.

If you have questions about smoothtops, you may want to send for an illustrated booklet that gives short, direct answers to the most frequently asked questions and explains what the glass-ceramic panel is and how the system works.

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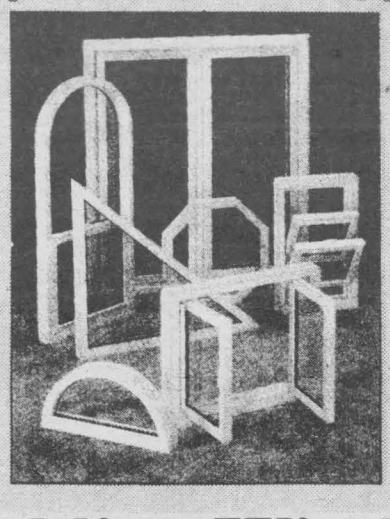

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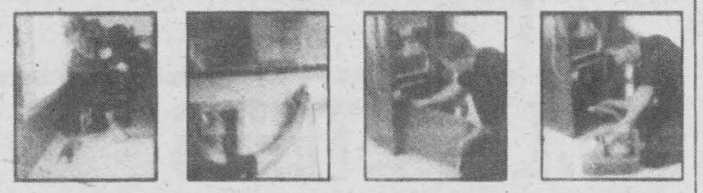

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Treat yourself to a living oasis this winter

The weather outside may be frightful, but you can make the inside of your home quite delightful this winter by augmenting your decorating scheme with a few well-chosen houseplants.

Indoor plants help chase away the winter blahs by providing lots of contrast, texture - and even escapism. In fact, the clever placement of some tropical plants, will actually let you pretend you're in your own soothing, tropical oasis free from winter's icy clutches.

Once you start decorating, you'll realize that houseplants fill ackward gaps, camouflage unsightly areas and bring new color and life to an entire room. You can also use them to highlight certain areas of you home by making them a focal point of a particular room.

For example, if you have a fireplace but rarely use it, consider placing a group of plants - or one large fern - on the hearth in front of the opening to brighten it up. Simply move the plant(s) out of the way before using the fireplace.

The added benefit to decorating with indoor plants is that it doesn't cost a fortune to make an impact.

Check Lighting Conditions

Before purchasing any plants, take a good look around your home to see what the lighting conditions of each room are like.

Contrary to what you may have thought, not all plants require a lot of sunlight to thrive. In fact, there are several varieties which prefer low or diffused light. If you can, jot down the size of plant(s) the space will accomodate.

You may find that one large plant may serve equally well as several smaller ones and might have a much more dramatic effect.

Take your notes along with you so that you can consult with experts at your local gardening centre or plant store if you need to.

When shopping for houseplants, check the information card which should come with each plant. This information will tell you the type of light and temperature conditions the plant prefers, along with any watering and fertilizing guidelines.

If this information is missing, or if you have a specific question about a particular plant, don't be afraid to ask questions.

Also check the bottom of the plant to see if it's rootbound - if it is, you will have to transplant it into a larger pot with more soil. Also check for any signs of insects or damage. Leaves should look healthy and be pliable.

If you're purchasings flowering plants, try to choose some with buds on them, so you'll have some attractive blooms to look forward to. Some flowering plants require certain types of fertilizer and soil (if you're transplanting) - and many are sensitive to temperature, so be sure to read the label carefully.

When transporting newly purchased plants in the winter, be sure they are enclosed adequately in paper or plastic. Tender leaves can freeze quickly in cold weather, so place them in the back seat of your car where they will receive some warmth - not in the trunk.

Arranging Plants

Plants artfully arranged on pieces of wooden furniture can make a stunning display - particularly if they are in attractive baskets or ceramic containers. If you're using baskets be sure to put some plastic drainage trays under any plants.

If you're using baskets which have been painted, it's a good idea to put a plastic tray underneath the bottom of the basket, so that the color won't come off on your furniture if you over water the plant.

Also take care when placing plain clay pots on wooden, unpainted window sills. If you leave water standing in the bottom of these pots, they may make marks on the sill.

Once you've arranged your plants, it's important to make sure they receive the proper amount of humidity. Keep in mind that groups of small plants together will produce more humidity than individual plants placed in isolated spots throughout a room.

Maintenance

Most varieties of plants will require watering when the soil becomes dry. Be sure to water them thoroughly, but don't over-water. Plants like cacti should only be watered when the surface soil becomes quite dry.

It's also important to keep leaves free of dust wherever possible. Plants cannot carry out photosynthesis properly when they're coated with dirt.

CONTINUED

Preparing

Continued from page 1

selves;

Keep the home fires burning

Tip: Install a natural gas fireplace for warmth, safety and fuel efficiency

"A natural gas fireplace is super-convenient," says Mr. Hughes. "You just turn it on to warm up the room while you're in it, then turn it off with a flick of a switch when you leave, " he says.

Natural gas fireplaces offer several advantages over conventional wood-burning ones. They:

- Reduce pollution;
- Operate for as little as 12 cents per hour;
- Don't suck warm air out of the house and up the chimney like wood fireplaces do;
- Mean less work for you: no more chopping, buying and hauling wood!
- Can sometimes be inserted right into your pre-existing wood-burning fireplace and chimney;
- Zero clearance fireplaces can be built right up against woodwork and wallboard;

Keep heat in, costs down

Tip: Insulate, insulate, insulate!

"A properly insulated attic can save you as much as 15 per cent of your home's total heat loss," says Mr. Hughes.

Consider these points when you decide on insulation:

- The attic must be properly ventilated;
- Your attic hatch must be well sealed and insulated so the heat you're already paying for doesn't leak from the house into the attic;
- Increase your energy savings by caulking and seating any openings;
- Check your level of attic insulation. You should have at least 11 to 13 inches of insulation;
- Consider new, energy saving, low-maintenance siding to seal warmth into your home;
- To maximize energy savings, insulate your basement and floors.

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Remembering Canada's worst natural disaster

by P.H.Nicol
Staff Reporter

In January, 1998, Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec experienced what has been termed the worst natural disaster in Canadian history - an ice storm that crippled the entire area for weeks. It took many people - and businesses - months to overcome the effects of this storm and here, staff reporter Peter Nicol warns us that we should not become complacent but should be prepared should it ever happen again.

Twenty months about the event, people are still talking about the storm of the century. They share their experiences with anyone who will listen, preferably people who went through the same things themselves. They share their trials and tribulations and their determination to never be caught short again.

Living in a rural setting, you expect the power to go out once in a while. Wind, snow, ice and mechanical failures can all cause their share of inconvenience, and for most people that's all these little power outages are; an inconvenience.

But when the power goes out for three weeks, and more in a few cases, and it does it right in middle of a Canadian winter, during the coldest month of the year, it is no inconvenience; it is a recipe for disaster.

Disaster was averted in Eastern Ontario. It was averted because the emergency measures people did an outstanding job of getting things organized well and quickly. But mostly, disaster was averted because people looked after each other; friends helped friends, neighbours helped neighbours and no-one in need was a stranger. The storm, in many ways, brought people closer together as a community more than any number of social engagements could have done. People were called upon to show their mettle, and they did it with flying colours.

But when all was said and done, there were many of us who determined that we would never again be pushed to the limit because the power was out for an extended period of time.

When my wife and I talked it over, we decided that we needed a supplementary source of three things: power, heat and light.

The power part was solved easily enough. After seeking the advice of friends who knew, we determined the size of generator we would need and went out and bought it. It could run a few lights for us, a hot plate maybe, and certainly the sump pump which at our house operates all year long.

Heat and light was a different story, though. The choices here were considerable. Should we go with a wood stove? Pellet stove? Propane? Each seemed to have their advantage, and each seemed to have their limitations.

Again, we depended on the experiences of friends and family and tried to match those with what we saw as our needs. In the end, we opted for propane: there is nothing to lift and carry, it works without electricity and the installation would be easier and less expensive. Heat circulation might be a problem, but we thought that a fan plugged into the generator would solve that and in any event, we would only be trying to heat a single room.

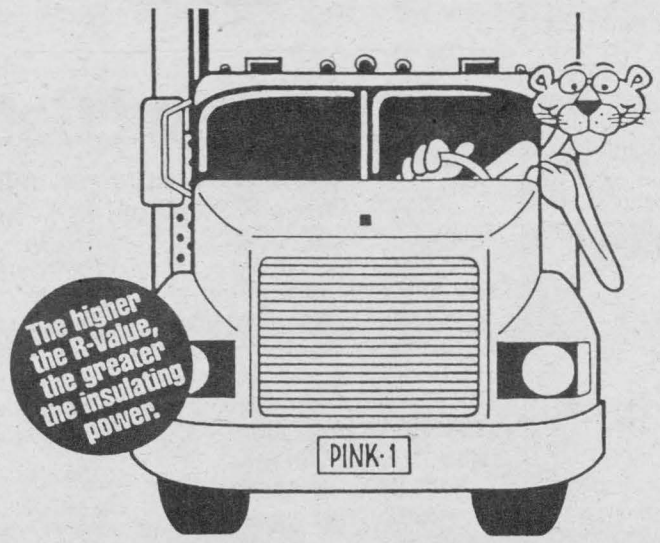
That was the good news.

The bad news was that it was decided (by someone about a foot shorter than me) that if we were going to go to all of this trouble anyway, why not revamp the whole family room? I am not a good revamper. But I am soon to become a poor revamper.

The paint has been bought and my wife, who loves to slop the stuff around, hurries home from school to get at it. The dog, the cats and the grandchild are hidden away lest they too become redecorated (remember, I said that she enjoyed painting, not that she was good at it). I have come to terms with the fact that I will once again lose several t-shirts which will be sacrificed to the painting gods and assigned at last to the great scrap heap we used to call a dump before the politically correct police cleaned up the term, if not the site.

I am not in a good position to say much about her prowess, though: my time is coming. I am the official wallpaper person at our house. I put up the wallpaper; the women and children leave for the day - calling in mid-evening to see if the stuff is up and its safe to come home; the animals disappear into thin air. There are times when I truly understand why Hitler thought it would be easier to try and take over the world than to put up another sheet of wallpaper. But one perseveres and the job gets done; rather well if I may say so.

We don't do these kinds of projects very often, which is good for our marriage, but this one will have a bit of a different twist. The wife is talking about installing new flooring too. (Well, to be more accurate, she is talking about me installing new flooring.) But I already have a plan for this. You start on the outside walls and make your way toward the centre of the room. Here, all mistakes will be discovered - but - it doesn't matter: this is why they invented throw rugs! Right?



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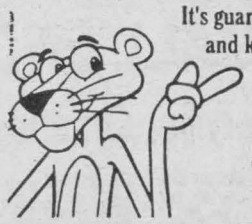

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CONTINUED

1540 Ventnor Rd.

Continued from page 2

each wall. The 18-foot high ceilings give this area a grand appearance, while still maintaining a warm and cozy feel, provided in part by the airtight Vagabond stove.

The large gourmet eat-in kitchen at the end of the house is raised up slightly from the main floor. The walls are lined with exquisite hand crafted pine cupboards accented by hunter green counter tops. Another seven-foot window extends into the master bedroom above. Adjoining the kitchen is the laundry and utility area, as well as a full bath with a shower and pedestal sink.



The main floor has two large bedrooms on either side of the foyer at the front end of the house. Two more seven-foot arched windows adorn each room. The old dry kitchen has been kept intact in the southwest bedroom and serves as a wonderful hobby area.

By choosing to construct a second level, Ford and Gaumont have added an incredible amount of functional space. Also built from the church pews, the staircase has become a conversation piece. It leads to a 29-foot bridge that adjoins the master's quarters to a spacious loft style office and library, surrounded by almost 70 feet of pine railing. The enormous attic above could easily be converted into a third floor if desired. The master bedroom includes a massive walk-in closet that would be any woman's dream. A romantic evening or relaxing bubble bath would be no trouble in the master ensuite which features, marble aqua and beech floors, and a roman tub.

Some of the most fun both Gaumont and Ford had building their home was shopping for the fixtures and items that are now incorporated into the decor. Becoming a yard sale aficionado was a new experience for Ford who had never attended a yard sale prior to his move to Ventnor. This adventurous attitude is displayed in the master bath where Ford chose to insert a Victorian sink into a 1920's style sideboard creating a unique washstand. He did have second thoughts about cutting into this valuable antique. "It took me three days to finally cut a hole in it ... I must have measured it a hundred times," Ford recalled.

Many treasures were unearthed during construction: two 100 year old pennies were retrieved from between the floor boards; a handkerchief was found encased in a wall; the original silver collection plates and the church Bible were also discovered. Ford and Gaumont carry on tradition by requesting that their visitors also sign the church guest book. The couple have been able to trace much of the history of the building from the multitude of records left behind. In their possession are such items as the petition to build the church, old bulletins, and even a few Sunday school certificates which they turned over to a neighbour so that he may attempt to return them to their families.

For Ford and Gaumont, the time has now come to invest themselves in other endeavours. The stone church located at 1540 Ventnor Road has been lovingly prepared for new owners to enjoy. For those who have always wanted the ambiance of an older home without the headaches that usually accompany it, this unique residence seamlessly blends the old with the new.



Renovating Tips

Things can get kind of messy when you renovate so remember these two tips: keep your focus and keep you sense of humour. Both will make life much easier.

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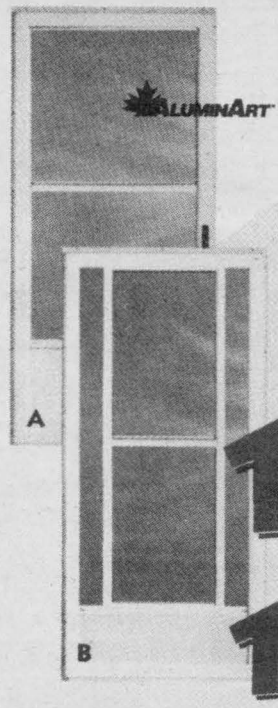

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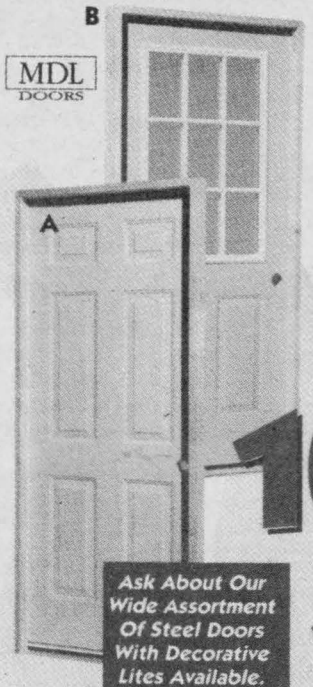

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