

The Devil is in the Details - Repairs and Small Remodeling Projects

by Sheldon Atovsky & Bob Shamo

What to do when a repair is needed in your condo, or you have a hankering for a small but significant structural improvement? We're talking here about unit owners who find a particular project beyond their skill level or requiring tools they don't have.

If, in fact, you are a renter, then you need to talk with your landlord. Your lease is probably pretty specific about alterations, and management requires owner direction/permission in all but the most obvious and emergency situations.

Our maintenance staff is equipped to do many commonly-needed repairs. Some are free to the unit owner, some are not. For instance, unclogging a plugged drain is "non-chargeable," while remounting a bi-fold kitchen pantry door will cost the standard \$40 per half hour or a portion thereof, plus parts.

If in doubt, a call to the office will bring a maintenance person to your unit, after which you'll be better informed about an appropriate fix.

For more extensive work, the Association's manual on Construction and Remodeling Policies and Procedures establishes three project categories. Category A Projects – minor ones not affecting the Common Elements (further identified in the manual) – are those being considered for this story.

Examples given in the manual are painting, wallpapering, replacing appliances, and removal and installation of carpeting. To these might be added replacing window sills, mounting television screens, and installing bookshelves, closet organizers and window shades.

Clearly, such projects are many and varied. If in doubt, ask. Category A Projects do not require Association approval, but management has witnessed a lot of them and may be able to help in unexpected ways.

Other than waiving the requirement for prior approval, all other Association rules, policies and procedures apply to Category A Projects. These are stated quite specifically in the CRPP manual and include deliveries, scheduling and noise control. In addition, certain tradesmen – for instance, electricians and plumbers – must be licensed.

Then, there's insurance. Contractors working in the building are required to carry general liability, vehicle, crime (theft), and umbrella coverage. Workers' compensation, another type of insurance, is also required for all but single-operator contractors. An insurance document, completed as a sample, is online at www.ptcondo.com/library/ under Useful Forms and Documents.

Given these guidelines and requirements, then, what are your options as an owner needing skilled help?

First, you may remember that in past years, certain of our maintenance staff accepted outside work. By and large, they do not do so anymore. While the Association allows it, our employees would likely not be covered by PTCA's own liability insurance should an incident occur outside their working hours. This limitation – and the occasional misunderstanding with an owner – have discouraged the practice.

How about a major remodeling contractor? Such companies are usually well qualified, employ licensed employees where needed, and have the necessary insurance. Park Tower has seen many of its units fully and beautifully renovated over the years.

If a major remodeler turns you down, it may be because the work you need is not sufficient to warrant making time for it and following through with the necessary paperwork. In other words, the job might not pay well enough to cover the company's very considerable overhead.

That leaves the solution many of our owners choose: Hire a handyman.

Yes, if you find an individual contractor with the right skills, licensing and insurance, he will be welcome in the building. In fact, while management does not recommend or list contractors, it can provide informal referrals given the nature of your

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project.

But for a handyman, the rub is often insurance. Unless he has several projects lined up in the building, the typical handyman may see insurance as an unaffordable expense. And owners who hire an uninsured individual (or company) – if caught – risk being fined by the Association. Then, too, imagine the legal risk should there be an accident!

National online services offer something of a blended solution. An inquiry to Mr. Handyman revealed that in addition to facilitating contact with one of several small north Chicago contractors, it provides an insurance document that can easily be tweaked to satisfy our requirements, guarantees licensing when required, and promises satisfaction.

The downside? \$158 for the first hour of service, \$52 for each additional 30 minutes, plus any materials needed.

As we go to press, Park Tower is considering an innovative approach to one partic-

ular project. In response to a suggestion made at the November 7 Owners' Forum, the Association is considering how it might encourage owners who don't already have thermostats to install them. Were this to happen, the building could realize substantial energy savings, thus lowering operational costs shared by all owners.

The Association would solicit interest among owners, then vet and select a single contractor to do the work. Questions would be asked, information shared, a schedule determined and thermostats installed .. all facilitated by the Association but contracted and paid for by individual owners.

Were this project to succeed, it could point the way to similar, grouped endeavors in the future **II**

New Offices Open in Park Tower's Business Mall

An attorney and his father, a certified public accountant, have set up shop in our Business Mall. They are at the 113A location, around the corner from the market, near the skylight and tables.

Attorney Stephen J. Feldman and CPA Roger Philip Feldman are sole practitioners. Stephen's primary areas of practice are criminal defense and DUI defense. He has had his own practice since 2003 and handles cases throughout Cook and the collar counties.

Roger's firm has provided tax services to businesses and individuals since 1970. He and his son have been sharing space since 2003 and moved here from a location in River North.

The office is open weekdays, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Contact information is at www.feldmancriminaldefense.com and www.rpfcpa.com **II**

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