

Storm Lake Times Pilot

## Storm Lake students building success

### Building Trades class home sells in just days

BY MEGAN MOLSEED

As the school year kicks off, students in Storm Lake High School's Building Trades class aren't sitting behind desks; they're jumping straight into hands-on learning, hammers first, building their latest home literally from the ground up.

"We need to get the base of the home done right away to get the walls up," explains SLHS Building Trades instructor Wilmer Flores. "This way, we'll be ready to begin working on the interior projects once winter hits."

Although the school year has just started, Flores's morning class is fully engaged, working hard on the new home site. Each student is focused on their task—cutting wood, arranging it on pallets or hammering nails, despite the ongoing heatwave, which has lessened somewhat as the week continues.

"Some students enter the class already knowing they enjoy working with their hands, while others are picking up tools for the first time," Flores notes. Each home takes about 10 months to complete.

The most recently finished home by the building trades classes was completed during the 2023-2024 school year. And, it can join the other success stories created by Flores's students after listing-

for \$299,500.

"It was listed on Friday and sold by Monday," Flores says with a smile, watching as his students remain hard at work on the first construction phases of this year's home, located just one lot away from last year's house directly across the street from the high school.

"It's a fantastic location for us. While our previous sites were great, we had to consider travel time for each class," Flores says. "With our lots so close to the school, that's no longer a concern."

While the building trades' most recent house isn't Tornado green, it still showcases a bit of school spirit with its hunter-green exterior, complemented by black trim and a black garage door.

The four-bedroom, three-bathroom home offers exceptional storage options. Each bedroom includes generous closet space, while the master bedroom features a spacious walk-in closet adjacent to the bathroom. Additional storage is provided under the stairs, with numerous closets, ample kitchen cabinets, and linen storage throughout. Located at 1014 Oneida St, the home spans 2,348 square feet and includes a two-car garage.

The open floor plan includes two bedrooms and two bathrooms on the first floor, with a master suite boasting a full bath and his-



Raul Rebollo, Bryan Ledesma and instructor Wilmer Flores in front of the newly completed home.

and-her sinks. The finished basement adds two more bedrooms and another full bathroom.

"We try and build these homes with our own lives in mind," Flores says. "It's important to us that it all looks good and the features are things that you would want in your own home."

Two students, Storm Lake seniors Bryan Ledesma and Raul Rebollo, who are part of the morning class working on this year's home, were also involved in last year's house.

Both Ledesma and Rebollo say they feel a strong

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3B



The heat isn't slowing down the Storm Lake High School Building Trades class as they spend their morning hard at work in their outdoor classroom.

## Carey's Furniture: A family legacy furnishing homes for over 40 years

BY ERIN RYDGREN

For over four decades, Carey's Furniture has been a retail cornerstone of Cherokee, providing residents with quality furniture, mattresses, and floor coverings. Founded in 1981 by Dave and Carol Carey, the business has grown from a small used furniture store to a multi-story showroom occupying six downtown properties.

Dave Carey was one of many employees who lost their jobs after the closure of Schmidt's Furniture in the early 1980s. With his wife Carol, they purchased used furniture from an upholstery shop, opening "Furniture Place" on East Main Street. Their inventory was all used merchandise purchased at auctions and on consignment.



As their business thrived, they relocated to a larger space on Fifth Street, eventually incorporating new furniture into their offerings.

In 1986, another move was necessary to accommodate their growth, leading them back to East Main Street, where their main entrance remains today. The focus

shifted to primarily new furniture, solidifying their position as a leading furniture provider in Cherokee.

Although he remained active in the business, Dave's retirement in 1993 saw Carol taking the helm, successfully running the business until their son Chad joined the

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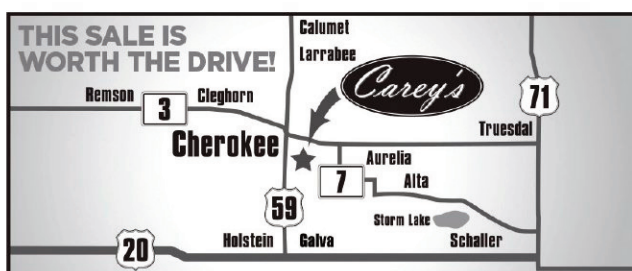
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## Building Trades...

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sense of pride knowing that their previous project sold just days after listing. They say they can't really pick a favorite piece of the homebuilding process, some of it was hard, some of it was easy, but putting up the drywall was something they each enjoyed when building the last home.

"Making the markings was kind of fun," Ledesma smiled. Rebollo agreed, noting that the drywall process was fun for him because it was the beginning of putting the pieces together.

"It's kind of when it starts to look like a home," the Storm Lake senior says. "Before that, it was a construction site."

### BUILDING SOMETHING BIG

Since 2018, Flores has led the Storm Lake High School Building Trades program. The goal, notes the school district, is to offer students a hands-on homebuilding experience while contributing new homes to the community. The trades program includes two classes: one in the morning with 18 students and another in the afternoon with 10 students.

Under Flores's leadership, the program has become a district highlight and even a profitable endeavor. Recent homes have sold for more

than their construction costs, allowing a reinvestment of the profits into purchasing new lots for future projects.

The Storm Lake CSD school board strategically bought three adjoining lots before starting construction on last year's home, planning ahead for the program's success.

"We have the land we need for the next three years," Flores says, emphasizing that this planning makes his class time much more productive. Knowing the lot size and shape in advance allows him to design homes more effectively with blueprints, and the building trades classes also know their project locations before starting their coursework.

"It's much easier when we can map out our plans a few years in advance," Flores explains. "We decide on floorplans based on lot size, code requirements, and what needs to be prepared for each location."

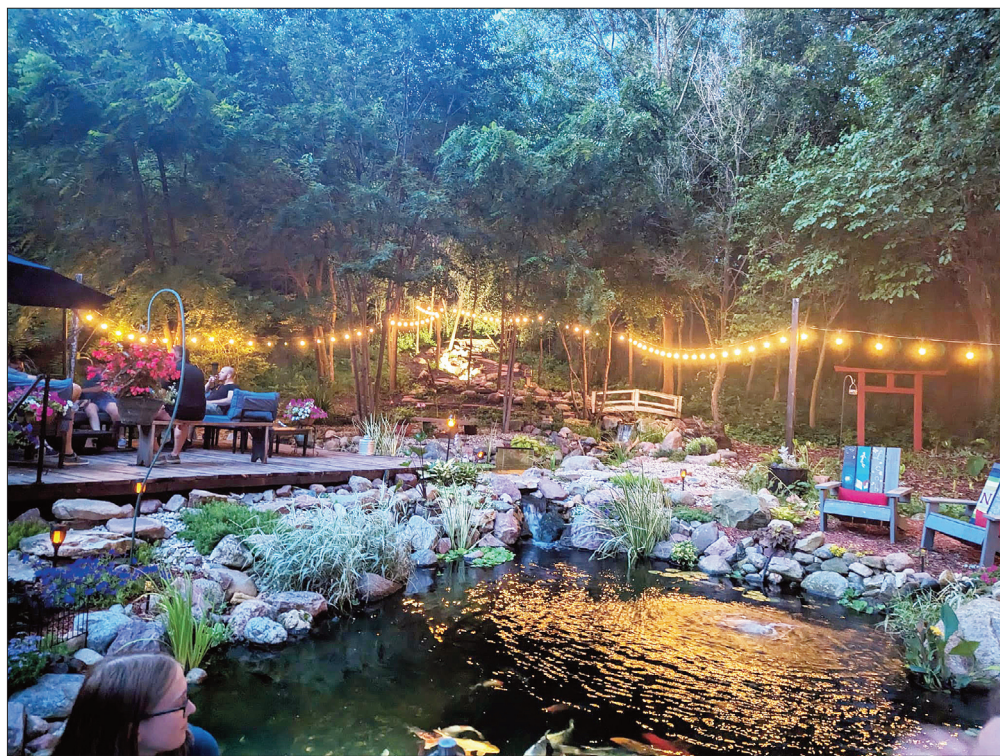
The Building Trades program supports local businesses. Floor plans come from Marcus Lumber, as well as the lumber from the base of the home to the shelving, cabinetry, trim, and beyond. Wiese Plumbing and Heating handles and installs the plumbing and heating, including bathroom fixtures.



Bryan Ledesma (left) and Raul Rebollo (middle) were part of the 2023-2024 class that built the home at 1014 Oneida under the direction of Building Trades instructor Wilmer Flores (right). The local home sold after just a few days on the market. TIMES PILOT photos by MEGAN MOLSEED



The Storm Lake High School Building Trades class is hard at work on the latest project just a lot away from the program's most recently completed project.



The Ellises live on about three acres in Cherokee. Their backyard makes up about two of that and the adjoining properties are all wooded, giving the impression that they aren't in town. "It's an oasis within the city," says Dave Ellis.

## Backyard transformed into aquatic oasis

BY ERIN RYDGREN

Dave and Cheryl Ellis have transformed their once-neglected backyard pond into a stunning and peaceful aquatic oasis. What began as a punishment for their daughter has blossomed into a multi-year project that has become the centerpiece of their property.

"To be completely honest," laughed Dave, "one of my daughters got in trouble, but I couldn't tell you for what. I was looking for the absolute worst punishment I could possibly come up with so I told her she had to go clean up the pond."

However, as she began to work he felt a smidgen of guilt "because it was just really gross," he said, so he went out and joined her. As they progressed, he began to think it would be fun to try to get it working again.

What began with cleaning up a stagnant pond was turned into an educational experience. Ultimately, Dave dug the pond deeper and bigger, using heavy machinery and completely added the lower pond to create natural filtration. Most recently, he's added a creek running downhill and into the pond.

Dave jokes, "At YouTube University I learned as much as I could about how to best filter it, keep the fish safe, and more." As they delved deeper into the project, their passion for creating a thriving aquatic ecosystem grew.

"We got goldfish at first to try it out," explained Dave. "We didn't want to get anything expensive until I knew I could keep fish." The pond, which now boasts a variety of koi fish, is a testament to their dedication to the project and determination to learn as

much as possible. "It was a monumental pain getting rid of the goldfish because they were hard to catch," laughed Ellis.

The other goal of this project was to create a welcoming space for their entire family. "We wanted to make it as accessible from the house as possible," said Dave. "So many people do these projects and stick them out in the back half of their properties and then never use them. We wanted it to be right there and be a place where our girls would bring their friends over to hang out. We're out there about every night."

The space has also been opened to their friends and family for events when requested. "We've had two baptisms, two weddings, graduation parties and the rehearsal dinner for our daughter Elizabeth's wedding," Dave tallied. The cross country team has also enjoyed access to the space during team dinners. Rightfully proud of their corner of paradise, Dave invites anyone who is interested in the scenery to reach out and talk to him about coming to see it.

Dave estimates that the pond at its deepest is around 5½ feet. In order for the fish to survive the winter they must have at least 2½ feet of water and a hole has to be cut in the ice in order for oxygen to circulate and gasses to escape.

The pond has four pumps on it for its various parts. It is all natural filtration which is great for maintaining water quality in koi ponds and relies on beneficial bacteria and aquatic plants to break down harmful substances to create a healthy environment for the fish. The plants absorb nutrients from the water, helping to reduce algae growth

and improve water clarity while providing oxygen and shelter for the fish.

The brook and the little creek were all hand dug while heavy machinery was used for the larger ponds. The space features rocks that he collected "From anyone and anywhere I could get them," says Dave. "And I moved all the rocks with the exception of the very biggest ones by hand." He jokes that he knows every single rock in the project.

Dave estimates that the pond takes about 10,000 gallons of water which comes from the city. The pond has an automatic fill on it so if the water level gets too low it will kick on and gradually refill. "The water bill is high," he admits. "It's similar to having a pool. It's higher than we would like but it's well worth the investment to have it."

The pond also draws in a lot of wildlife. They had to take steps to protect the fish from predators like raccoons and foxes. "The way it's designed is that it's deep enough on the sides that a raccoon can't get in and just start picking off the fish," Dave explains. There are also plenty of built-in hiding spaces and plants to keep them safe. However, what he really dreads is a heron finding the place. "If they ever find the pond it would be catastrophic," he said. "They will find it and remember it and just decimate all of the fish."

As their pond continues to grow and evolve, the Ellises are excited to see what the future holds. They hope to continue to inspire others to create their own backyard havens and enjoy the beauty of nature.

## Carey's...

*continued from page 1B*

team in 1998. Chad brought a fresh perspective and began expanding the showroom, staffing, and product lines. In 2002, they rebranded as "Carey's Furniture," reflecting the family's dedication and commitment to personalized customer service.

Carey's Furniture has continuously evolved over the years. Their downtown facility now sprawls across six properties, including their showroom in three historic buildings on four different floors. Additionally, the business has expanded to include a second warehouse offsite.

Recognizing the growing importance of online shopping, they've invested heavily in their website, careysfurniture.com, which boasts over 33,000 furniture items and is now outpacing their brick-and-mortar business for sales.

Most recently, they've completed a renovation of their lower level, creating a dedicated "Clearance Cellar" showcasing overstock, discontinued, flawed, and used display models at reduced

prices.

Since 2001, Chad has spearheaded the store's merchandising, but his wife Kelli has joined him in that responsibility. The couple works hard to ensure a visually appealing and ever-changing showroom experience. With over 20,000 square feet of space, displays are being refreshed almost daily, always creating a fresh look.

The Careys are well-versed in tracking stylistic trends and materials. Chad indicated that "Modern and urban rustic are popular right now and recently we've seen interest in minimalist styling."

They strive to provide these popular options and are dedicated to maintaining connections across the industry to monitor trends. "We rely on trade publications, manufacturers, instinct, and most importantly, we listen to our customers," explained Chad. "Preferences are always changing," he continued. "One of the more notable would be that many customers now prefer beds that do not require boxspring or foundations."

Additionally, the furniture industry has continued to embrace technology from

manufacturing, marketing, retail and the products themselves, all of which are designed for consumers with, as Chad puts it, "with tech in their pockets."

Carey's Furniture is deeply committed to giving back to the community they serve. None of their employees receive a commission and are encouraged to instead strive for customer satisfaction regardless if there is a purchase. The business offers financing options, delivery service, and even will dispose of old mattresses and furniture.

Recognizing a deep need, they offered special programs to assist flood victims after the historic flooding in late June. Coupons and gift cards were offered with purchases as well as free financing on approved credit, free delivery up to 50 miles, and free storage. Individuals could also make arrangements to donate their old furniture and Carey's would pick it up and deliver it to flood victims.

Carey's Furniture encourages everyone to visit their showroom space or check out their website for inspiration or assistance.

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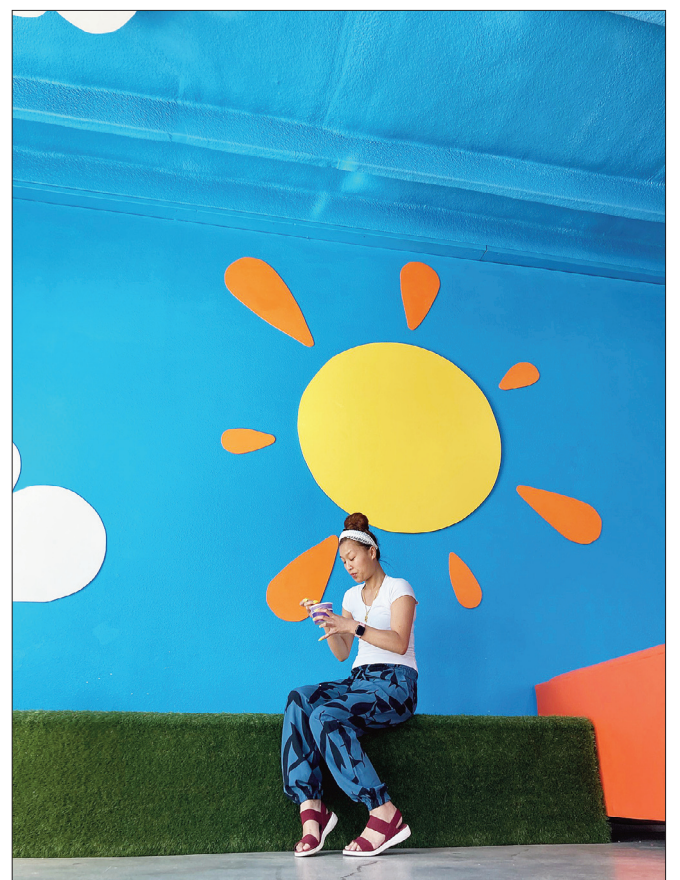
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# Crystal Clean

Storm Lake, IA



Tonya Santos' nephew Bryce Hogrefe wipes a table outside. Note the blue rolled ice cream in the giant window sticker designed by Santos. The Spot remains the only place to get rolled ice cream in Storm Lake. Inset: The bright colors in The Spot accentuate items on the menu, like this "sunset" lemonade.



Kethy Thephavong, a regular customer, sought refuge at The Spot on a 90° day this week.

# Handmade decor is unique, cheerful



Bright orange sofas can be wiped clean in case of spills.

BY DOLORES CULLEN  
A little imagination goes a long way when remodeling a room, or a home, or a business. So when Tonya Santos learned that her ice cream shop, The Spot, would have to move from its location across from King's Pointe, she looked for a place she could stamp with her own brand of creativity.

Now walk into The Spot at 1607 Lake Avenue and you're greeted by bursts of bright color and comfortable areas in which to mingle and enjoy the ice cream.

"I wanted to bring the outdoors in," says Santos.

The building, adjacent to Imagine the Possibilities, used to be a can and bottle redemption center. Most recently it was a warehouse for a water treatment business, with dirt on the concrete floor and a Bobcat parked in the middle of it. Not very inviting.

To Santos, "It was a complete blank canvas."

Cleanup commenced. A painter was hired to spray the dingy insulated ceiling a bright blue – sky blue – and the color extends down the walls.

Santos' daughter drew huge bulbous cloud shapes. Santos cut them out of ply-



Madelyn Hogrefe, niece of Tonya Santos, has made a waffle taco! Santos designed the whole menu board.

wood and painted them white. She attached them to the ceiling and centered a can light in the middle of each.

Likewise a big yellow plywood circle becomes a focal point "sun," literally a spot, on the north wall.

Bringing the outdoors in meant bringing in grass-like imitation turf, which covers the sides of the counter. A few extra yards were cut into a kidney shape to become a groovy rug where a Plinko game is set up.

When Santos obtained her

business degree at Buena Vista University she picked up graphic design skills. She designed the entire menu for The Spot and even designed the ice cream images that became huge stickers attached to the front windows.

Designing and creating The Spot's decor by herself not only saved the Santos family business money, it distinguishes this ice cream Mecca from run-of-the-mill chain operations.

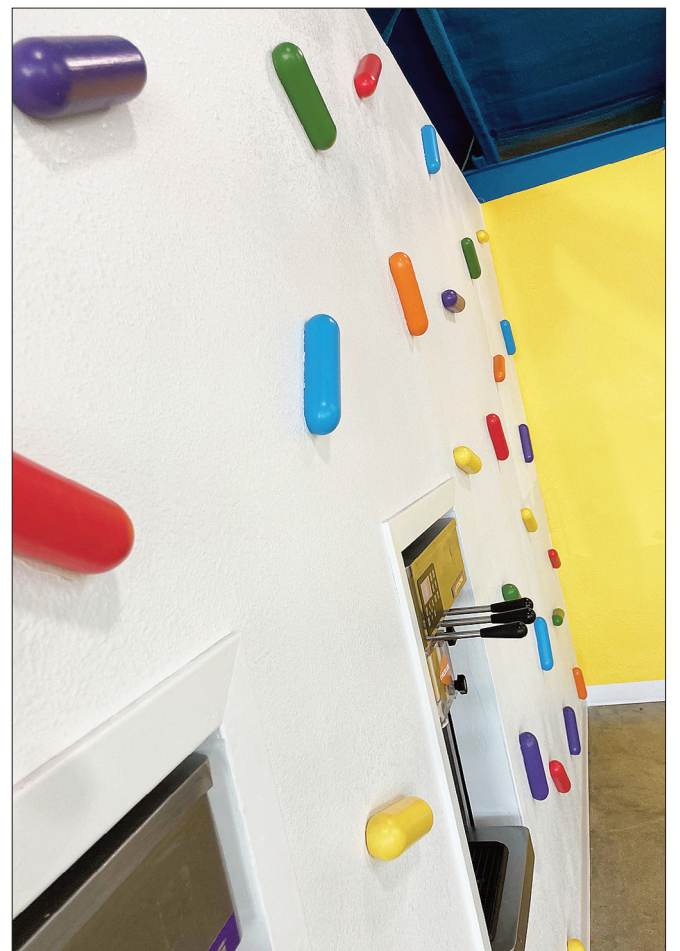
Plus, as Santos says, "It was fun."



Santos used a Cricut machine for various DIY projects, including the labels on the ice cream topping containers.



Sabastian Rosales in a corner set up with games.



Another whimsical touch is the soft-serve wall, which is covered with giant-sized sprinkles. Santos' son created them with a 3-D printer.

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Above: The spacious family friendly interior can be used for birthday parties. Left: No, these aren't cigarettes. They're funnel cake fries, fresh from the air fryer and dusted with powdered sugar. Kids like the big smiley face on the counter.

Times Pilot photos by Dolores Cullen



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