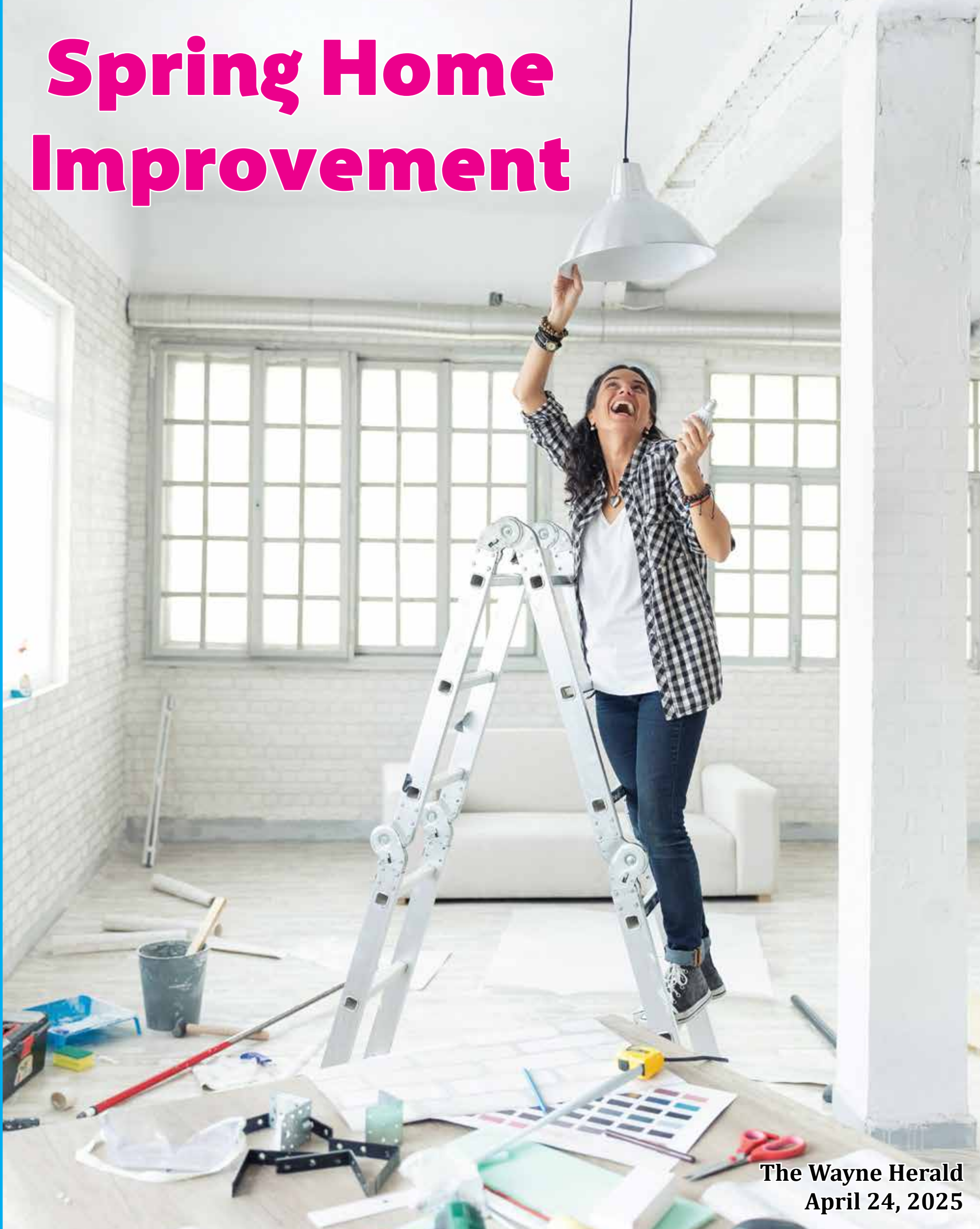


Spring Home Improvement



The Wayne Herald
April 24, 2025

Sebade Construction celebrates 30 years in business

Chad Sebade said that while he had the opportunity to follow in his father's footsteps and go into farming, he chose instead to "grow" homes for area residents.

In March of 1995 Sebade started his own construction business after having worked for other contractors for some time.

"I started off small and evolved to doing many construction project," Sebade said.

Among those projects are more than

20 custom homes, additions, free-standing garages, concrete projects, multi-family apartments and a number of other construction jobs.

Working with Sebade are Rob Allen, the main carpenter who has been with the company for 25 years; Koinn, a carpenter who has been with the company for five years and Ethan Sebade who handles concrete and is a carpenter. Brandon Sebade is the main concrete and skidloader operator.

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Construction specializes in new custom homes, residential roofing, commercial/residential siding, home additions, decks, kitchen remodels and new windows and doors.

During an open house earlier this year

to showcase his work and celebrate 30 years in business, Sebade thanked the community for its support and those he has worked with in various ways on many of the projects he has completed.



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Tips to renovate your house on a budget

Renovations around the house require an investment of time and often considerable amounts of money. Findings from the 2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study show that home renovations are becoming more expensive. The median renovation spending for homeowners has gone up 60 percent since 2020. Angi, a home services website, reports the average renovation cost for homes between 1,250 and 1,600 square feet is \$51,772, but the final cost of home renovations

- **Maximize an existing floor plan.** This Old House suggests looking for ways to maximize your current layout before you invest in major renovations like an expansion. Bring in a designer with an eye for utilizing space. For example, see how you might be able to replace shelves with pull-out drawers in the kitchen. Moving furniture around or rethinking floor plans also can help to lower costs.
- **Balance DIY with hiring contrac-**

can be great places to find certain home improvement materials and furnishings.

- **Take advantage of free services.** Certain stores may offer things like free consultations with designers who can show you what a renovation can look like. This is advantageous to the stores because once you see the potential you're more likely to buy the products, even if it's not mandatory.
- **Resurface instead of redo.** Certain items can be made to look new with

minimal effort. Paint is a relatively inexpensive tool that can transform walls and more. A good hardwood flooring company can buff out a floor and put a new coating instead of an entirely new floor. Kitchen cabinets can be resurfaced instead of replaced as well.

Finding ways to perform home renovations on a budget may require some creative thinking, but it's possible to get results at the right price point.



depends on the scope of the project.

Homeowners who are conserving funds can rest assured that it is possible to make meaningful changes both inside and outside a home without breaking the bank. Here are some ways to renovate a home on a budget.

- **Create a budget and don't waver.** Figure out exactly what you can afford for a renovation and then make that your maximum dollars spent. Research comparable projects in your area and be honest about whether you can afford the renovation as-is or if you must adapt ideas to fit your price. Make sure to build in a cushion of around 15 to 20 percent for any unforeseen expenses that may arise once a renovation is underway.

tors. You can save money by tackling some projects yourself, but only if you are confident in your renovation skills. Rather than risk making costly mistakes and having to redo things, hire well-vetted professionals but ask if there's any DIY work you can do to cut costs.

- **Check clearance and resale stores.** Shop discount stores for building materials to save money. For example, if a builder ordered too many cabinets they may offer them to Habitat for Humanity ReStores, which are nonprofit home improvement stores and donation centers. Checking the clearance and markdown sections of other stores may yield considerable savings on items needed for a renovation. Warehouse retailers like Costco or Sam's Club also



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Soak up these luxurious bathroom features

Kitchens and bathrooms are two popular areas to address when renovating a home. Modernize Home Services says 26% of sellers make bathroom improvements to their homes before listing. Midscale bath remodels will net a return on investment of about 64%, while a luxury bathroom overhaul has an ROI of about 57%.

When considering bathroom renovations, homeowners may want to include some unique features that can add style and function, not to mention some

much-deserved luxury. With that in mind, the following are some luxurious features to consider.

Heated floors

There is something to be said for stepping out of the shower and being met with warmth underfoot. Heated floors are not just for people who live in cold climates, either. When the air conditioning is pumping on hot days, tile floors can feel chilly. Heated floors also are aesthetically appealing because homeowners don't have to factor in

baseboard heaters or forced-air vents.

Steam showers

There are many different steam showers on the market, and each can turn regular showers into steamy spa-like enclaves. A steam shower is similar to a sauna and utilizes a steam generator to produce steam in a single area, advises Badeloft® Luxury Bathrooms.

Frameless shower

A frameless (glass) shower door is not only luxurious but also functional for people who want to age in place. With no edge or lip to step over to enter the shower, anyone with mobility challenges can walk into a frameless shower safely.

Water closet



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Soaking tub

Although the majority of people shower as part of their daily hygiene routine, a deep soaking tub separate from the shower is ideal for those who enjoy a good bath.

Luxury mirror

Upgrading the bathroom mirror to one that offers features like defoggers, integrated lighting and a dimmer setting can elevate the bathroom.

Floating vanity

A floating vanity is mounted directly to the wall to leave space underneath. Better Homes & Gardens says a floating vanity can lend an airy feel to a bathroom.

If space allows, separating the toilet in a water closet from the rest of the bathroom space affords even more privacy. Plus, in couple's bathrooms, a water closet enables two to use the bathroom at the same time for different functions.

Walk-in-closet

Relocating the bedroom closet to right off the owner's bathroom affords an immediate opportunity to dress comfortably, thus streamlining a morning routine.

Bathroom renovations are worthwhile investments. Choosing some unique upgrades can enhance the design and function of these important spaces.

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How to boost home value before selling

People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally

facing cabinets, upgrading countertops and changing fixtures or hardware to give the room an overhaul.

Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home value. Katie Severance, author of *The Brilliant Home Buyer*, characterizes kitchens and baths as “money rooms” that add the most value to a home.

Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items

renovation with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers. Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.

Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to view a property or look at a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained

and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room.

Homeowners can consider a number of improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.



just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.

Make kitchen and bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate kitchen upgrades like resur-

face them no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular among home buyers.

When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves living there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective



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Four signs of potential electrical hazards in a home

Homeowners know that the work of maintaining a home is never done. Cleaning is a daily task associated with homeownership, and such sessions can reveal more than dust buildup or dirty walls and surfaces.

When cleaning a home, homeowners can pull double duty and look for potentially hazardous situations. For example, vacuuming and dusting sessions can present a great opportunity to spot electrical hazards that might otherwise go unseen. With that in mind, homeowners can keep an eye out for these four signs

of potential electrical hazards when working around the house.

1. Tingling when touching an electrical appliance: The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) advises homeowners to call a qualified electrician immediately if they experience a tingling feeling when touching an electrical appliance. The Electrical Safety Office notes experiencing a tingle or the feeling of being shocked is not normal. Homeowners who experience such a feeling should avoid the location and warn others in the home to do the same.




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2. Wall outlets that look or feel unusual: Wall outlets do not garner much attention, as many are low enough to be out of sight or even behind furniture. So a cleaning session might be the only time homeowners will notice issues with wall outlets. The NFPA notes discolored outlets or outlets that feel warm to the touch is a sign of an electrical problem. Various issues can cause outlets to look or feel unusual. An outlet could be short-circuiting or wires could be damaged, and each issue merits the attention of a qualified electrician.

3. Foul odors: An odor that calls to mind burning rubber is another indicator of an electrical problem. Various electrical experts indicate such odors can be indicative of damaged wiring, an overloaded circuit or loose connections, each of which poses a significant safety hazard. The NFPA urges homeowners to contact a qualified electrician immediately if they sense a smell of burning rubber in their homes.

4. Flickering lights: Homeowners won't need to wait until cleaning ses-

sions to notice flickering lights. Such flickering is hard to miss regardless of what residents are doing inside a home. Sometimes lights flicker because of a loose bulb, so homeowners who notice flickering should first turn off the light, let the bulb cool down if need be and then check to make sure it isn't loose. If the bulb isn't loose, then lights could be flickering for a multitude of reasons. A loose connection can cause flickering, as can an overloaded circuit. Homeowners also may not realize that not all bulbs and dimmer switches are designed to work together. For example, modern LED light bulbs often require the installation of specific dimmer switches or the lights won't operate properly. Flickering can result if these products are not compatible. If a home is old, then flickering lights could be due to old wiring that needs to be replaced.

Daily and weekly cleaning sessions can be a good time for homeowners to perform a quick audit of electrical outlets and lights to ensure everything is safe and working properly.



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How to upgrade your home to accommodate modern living

Remodeling projects allow homeowners to put their personal stamps on a property. In addition to choosing a color and design scheme that fits a particular aesthetic, homeowners may want to outfit their homes with various features that can make them more accommodating to modern living. Homeowners can



use these ideas as a springboard for remodeling projects designed to modernize their homes.

Open floor plans

Open floor plans remain coveted characteristics of modern home architecture. An open layout enables occupants to feel like they are enjoying spaces together without having to be on top of one another. Since sightlines are not obstructed in open floor plans, homeowners can enjoy a cohesive design style

across each level of the home.

Eco-friendly features

Eco-friendly features modernize homes and may even earn homeowners rebates from the government. From positioning rooms to take advantage of natural sunlight to using environmentally responsible materials throughout a home, modern homes can function with a much smaller carbon footprint than older structures.

Smart home technology

A smart home is equipped with appliances and other devices that can be controlled remotely, typically from a phone or computer connected to the internet. Investopedia notes that smart home technology offers homeowners convenience and cost savings. Smart home technology is available across a wide range of budgets, ranging from thousands of dollars for a complete home automation to roughly \$100 for a small change like a smart thermostat.

Accessibility features

A home that can grow with its residents is advantageous. When choosing renovations, features like slip-resistant flooring, stylish grab bars and low-threshold or barrier-free showers can enable homeowners to age in place more

comfortably.

Dual owner's suites

Dual owner's suites can be an asset for couples who choose to sleep separately. The Sleep Foundation says individuals choose to sleep in different rooms for a variety of reasons, notably reduced sleep interruptions and improved sleep quality. Plus, an extra bedroom can come in handy when one person is ill or in the event a partner snores. Rather than one person in the relationship getting the "lesser" space, certain homebuilders

now offer plans for dual owner's suites so both people get the features they desire in a bedroom.

Three-season room

Many homeowners aspire to bridge the gap between the indoors and outside. Three-season rooms help transition from the yard to the interior of a home, and offer a touch of nature without the bugs or unpleasant elements.

A number of home improvements can bring homes up to the standards of modern living.

J & JR Construction LLC building a solid reputation in the area

By: Nick Schinker,
freelance writer

When Jamie Rodriguez brought his landscaping and construction skills to Wayne, he also brought his dream of building a successful construction business.

Today, Rodriguez and his wife, Nancy, are the co-owners of J & JR Construction, LLC, where Rodriguez applies more than a decade of experience to a variety of construction and roofing projects in Wayne and the surrounding area.

Kimberly Zuñiga is the oldest of the six Rodriguez children and serves as the company's business administrator. She

also is a student at Wayne State College majoring in human resources management with a minor in construction management.

Zuñiga explains that the "J" in J & JR Construction is for her father, known to most people as Jimmy. "He named the business 'J & JR' in the hope of eventually making it a family business," Zuñiga says. "For now, I guess I can be the JR."

Rodriguez founded the business in Wayne in 2018. "We do both commercial and residential construction, with 90 percent being residential," Zuñiga says. "We do a lot of remodeling updates; inte-

See REPUTATION, page 8A



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(continued from page 4A)

rior work including carpentry, drywall, painting and flooring, as well as roofing, siding and concrete work. We'll do new construction when a large contractor needs a subcontractor."

The family began working with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Wayne after meeting SBDC Center Director Benjamin Benton at a banquet the local economic development organization, Wayne America, Inc., sponsors annually. The Nebraska SBDC is a program of the NBDC.

"We first went to the event in 2022, not really knowing what to expect, and it was very nice and a good way to meet fellow business people," Zuñiga says. "In 2024, we donated an item to the auction – a toolbox, tools and some swag."

She says Benton happened to be seated at their table. "I asked him what he and the NBDC do, and he said we help small businesses grow," she recalls. "I said, 'You and I are going to be best friends.'"

They began working together on various aspects of the business including marketing, financial resources, pricing and finding customers. "Right from the start, Ben opened doors I never knew existed," she says.

Benton says J & JR Construction was



The J & JR Construction team strive to provide quality work for residents of the Wayne area.

one of his first clients at the Wayne NBDC office. "We still meet at least once a month," he says. "I have helped them with a business plan, financial projections, and now we're working on payroll solutions to help with cash flow."

He says he is impressed by Rodriguez and his team's dedication to quality and to helping the community. "They own land in Wakefield for future multi-

family development, and are currently selling a house in Coleridge that they renovated literally from the ground up," Benton says.

Rodriguez and Zuñiga are eager to take advantage of the NBDC opportunities, including networking events and educational workshops, Benton says. "They're also active in the Small Business Administration offerings

online, and most recently completed the new 'Are You Lender Ready?' series in Omaha," he says.

Zuñiga says the NBDC and Wayne America, Inc., are having a positive impact on her family's business. "We're getting a lot of word-of-mouth recommendations," she says, "and both organizations have been sending prospective customers our way."

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Spring Home Improvement



What can renters do to secure their financial futures?

Renting an apartment or a home is convenient for people just starting out in life who may not have ample savings or a high enough credit score to secure a mortgage. Renting also may be necessary for individuals who have been priced out of a real estate market that

report their payment timeliness. A positive rental history that is reported can help renters improve their credit scores. A landlord needs to be signed up with a rental payment service that works with Experian for this data to be posted. In addition to this, renters should make sure to pay off credit card balances in full each month and make loan payments on time, which can positively affect their credit rating.

Build an emergency fund

Establish a fund that contains at least three to six months' worth of living expenses to provide a safety net in case of unexpected events. This may help renters avoid debt that can take years to pay off.

Contribute to a retirement account

Put a portion of money toward a 401(k) or an IRA even if you are renting. Find out if your employer will match contributions. Retirement accounts with sizable balances can provide a safety net whether you rent or own your home.

Stay apprised of local real estate trends

Monitor current market conditions and use that knowledge to negotiate lower lease payments if the market suggests you're overpaying. If a landlord is unwilling to negotiate, consider moving at the end of your current lease.

Renters can take steps to secure their financial futures even if they never end up buying a home of their own.



has remained high over the last several years.

Though conventional wisdom may suggest renting is a poor long-term investment, there are certain benefits to renting. In addition, renters can look to various strategies to solidify their financial futures.

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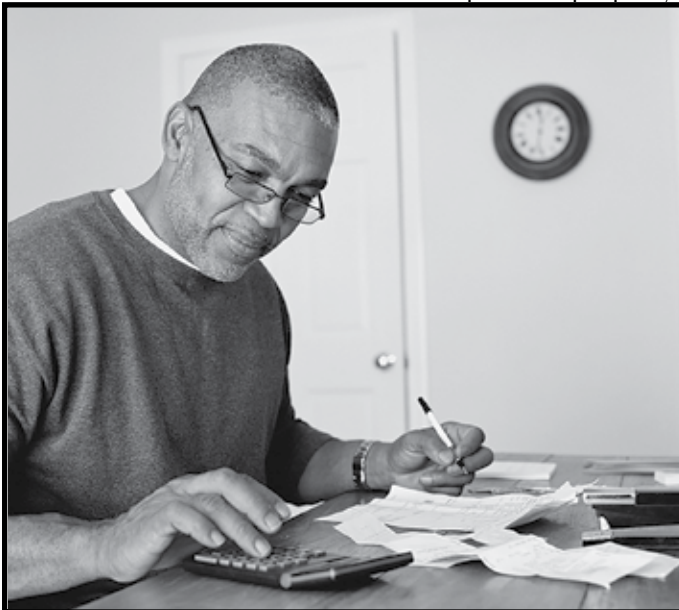
Renters can ask a landlord to use a resource like Experian's RentBureau to

Surprising hidden costs of home ownership

A home is the most expensive purchase many people ever make. Buyers understand that certain costs come with home ownership. However, some of the costs associated with home ownership

Property taxes

Depending on where you live, property taxes can comprise a large portion of monthly expenses. Some people pay their property taxes separate from their mortgage payments. Others wrap the tax burden into their mortgage bill. Either way, Business Insider reports that New Jersey currently has the highest effective property tax rate in the United States, with a median Garden State property tax bill at \$9,000 annually. The lowest property tax rate is found in Hawaii, and the average homeowner there pays only \$2,000 in property taxes annually. Zoocasa reports that annual property



can catch even the most savvy savers off-guard. And in recent years, those extra costs have been surging.

The following are some of the unexpected expenses that come with living the homeowner dream.

taxes in Canada can cost anywhere from \$2,500 to \$10,000 depending on the province's property tax rate and average cost of homes.

Home insurance

CNN Business reports that home

insurance premiums have surged in recent years, in large part due to extreme weather. In the U.S., insurance rates jumped 11.3 percent nationally last year, according to S&P Global. Severe storms, including hurricanes and wildfires, cost homeowners insurance agencies nearly \$101.3 billion last year, and those losses have been passed on to policy holders through higher prices.

Mortgage insurance

Many people do not have the standard 20 percent down payment necessary to buy a home. To circumvent this, lenders will require borrowers to take out mortgage insurance, also called PMI, to offset their risk. Credit Karma says PMI depends on factors such as down payment and borrowers' credit scores, but typically it's around 0.2 to 2 percent of the loan amount per year. You can remove PMI from your monthly payment once you have 20 percent equity in your home.

Maintenance

Even a brand new home will require some measure of maintenance and routine upkeep. Bankrate indicates one of the biggest costs of owning a home is maintenance, coming in at roughly \$3,018 a year and an additional \$3,300 for

improvements. Lawn care, home cleaning, pest prevention, replacing smoke alarms and batteries, roof repair, and clearing rain gutters are some of those costs.

HOA and CDD fees

Some communities impose homeowners association fees on those who live within the neighborhood. Such fees cover items like maintenance in and around the community and snow removal. A Community Development District Fee is imposed by the developer of a neighborhood or subdivision to finance the cost of amenities in a neighborhood. Homeowners should be aware of these fees before buying in an HOA community.

Apart from these expenses, annual utility payments can be quite expensive. Utilizing utility plans that offer a fixed cost per month can help homeowners budget for utility expenses more readily.

Home ownership can be costly. Buyers would be wise to familiarize themselves with some of the hidden costs of owning a home prior to purchasing one of their own.



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On the job training

Students at Wayne High School have the opportunity to get first-hand knowledge and 'on the job training' through the Construction 1. This class is being taught by Derek Jueden. Throughout the year, students have completed several projects for community members. This includes a demolition project and pouring of a concrete slab (pictured here). In addition, the students helped the school with other projects like hanging shelves and hanging and finishing drywall.

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How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can

dominate interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an

which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

Don't forget shade

Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day

long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.



be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

Refresh the landscape

Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that

unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible

Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

Add a water feature

Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify



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Pros and cons of open concept floor plans

Open floor plans that make it easy to move through primary living and entertaining areas have been popular for decades. Open concept floor plans join the dining room, kitchen and living (great) room into a communal space where sight lines are maximized and walls are minimal.

According to JJones Design Co., the origins of open concept floor plans may be traced to the deaf community. An open layout allows for better visual communication and awareness of one's surroundings, and some deaf individu-

als modified their kitchen and living spaces to facilitate more room for social gatherings and signing. Nowadays, it's nearly impossible to find a new construction with closed-off rooms. Here's a look at some of the pros and cons of having an open-concept home.

Benefit: Open concept plans make small spaces feel bigger. When smaller homes are broken up by walls, they can seem even smaller. By tearing down walls, one can trick the mind into thinking there is more square footage.

Drawback: The space may feel too

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large. An open concept floor plan in a large home can make interior spaces feel cavernous. A cozy home can be difficult to achieve with fewer walls.

Benefit: Open concept plans facilitate the flow of natural light. Without walls to break up rooms, homeowners can maximize light coming in through their windows. This also may help to brighten darker rooms that do not get as much natural light.

Drawback: Privacy can be hard to achieve. Unobstructed views from windows and doors can make it more challenging to create privacy when desired. When window shades are open, passersby can see into a home. Also, sunlight may end up wearing out flooring and furniture throughout the home.

Benefit: Open floor plans allow more space to spread out when entertaining. One of the biggest pluses of open floor plans is that it makes it easier to host crowds. Guests can enjoy the communal space, while hosts can still interact with friends and family even while preparing meals in the kitchen.

Drawback: Homeowners will likely

need to do more cleaning ahead of hosting guests, as multiple rooms will be on display. Also, cleanup afterwards may be more arduous since guests have spent time in multiple spaces.

Benefit: Open concept plans can improve property value. The home renovation experts at The Spruce note open floor plans are desirable and increase the value of a home by up to 7.4 percent a year.

Drawback: Some home buyers are beginning to shy away from open floor plans. This may have been prompted by stay-at-home requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, when multiple family members were working and doing school work at home. In that environment, an open-concept layout didn't provide the privacy or distraction-free spaces residents may have needed.

Open floor plans have been around for more than 30 years, but they aren't everyone's cup of tea. The pros and cons of this design style merits consideration when renovating or shopping for a home.

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How to find the right contractor for your next home renovation

Home renovations are significant undertakings. Though some projects require more sizable investments of time and money than others, all merit homeowners' attention and inspire some excitement when pondering the finished product.

A finished product tends to offer more appeal when the project is overseen

can help homeowners cut down on the pool of potential contractor candidates, which is no small benefit in markets flooded with renovation professionals.

Secure multiple written estimates

It can be time-consuming to speak to multiple contractors and secure written estimates from each one, but such legwork is well worth the effort if the

it easier for homeowners to keep lines of communication open. Many projects also require a little post-completion upkeep or even some tweaks, which is more easily accomplished when working with contractors based nearby. And finally, local contractors will be familiar with building codes and other details specific to a given town. That familiarity can ensure a project is done in adherence to codes and not stalled by permit- or inspection-related delays.

Confirm their insurance

Travelers Insurance urges homeowners to confirm a contractor is properly

insured and bonded prior to signing a contract. Contractors should be willing to provide a certificate of insurance (COI) that indicates their provider, policy number and coverage limits. Travelers also notes homeowners can contact insurers directly to verify coverage and ensure the policy is current. Never hire a contractor who is uninsured or unwilling to provide proof of insurance.

Hiring a contractor to perform a home renovation may be a leap of faith, but homeowners can take steps to ensure they find the right professional for the job.



and undertaken by a professional contractor. Small projects may be in the wheelhouse of skilled do-it-yourselfers, but most homeowners are best served leaving home renovations to the professionals. Finding the right contractor for a given job is of the utmost importance, and the following are some tips to help homeowners do just that.

Seek word-of-mouth recommendations

Word-of-mouth advertising has long been recognized as an invaluable tool to attract customers, and for good reason. A 2025 report on the state of the roofing industry provided by Roofing Contractor, the official publication for the International Roofing Expo®, found that 79 percent of homeowners identify word-of-mouth as the top way to find a roofing professional. Word-of-mouth is so valued because homeowners can ask friends or neighbors about their experiences with a given professional in a pressure-free setting. Word-of-mouth also

end result is finding the right contractor. Secure multiple estimates even if the first one provided to you is below budget. Multiple estimates allow homeowners to compare what's included, and not included, in each one. Some contractors offering low estimates may not include materials costs or additional factors that will increase the price. Others may seem more expensive initially but may prove more affordable than competitors if their estimates include all of the costs associated with the project. Only a direct comparison of multiple estimates, which should include details specific to the project and an itemized list of what will be provided and performed by the contractor, can give homeowners an idea of what they're paying for.

Stay local when possible

Hiring local contractors is beneficial for a number of reasons. Hiring locals keeps money in the community and thus supports the local economy. And working with local contractors can make



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GENERATIONS OF EXCELLENCE

How to organize a home's interior

The dawn of a new year marks a convenient time to turn over a new leaf. Much attention is paid to individuals' intentions to eat healthier and exercise more at the start of a new year, but those goals are not the only ways to embrace positive change come January.

A quick look around a home's interior may lead some to conclude that their home environments could benefit from a little less clutter and some improved organization. A more organized home

may be easier to navigate and can even have a positive impact on residents' mental health. In fact, a 2021 study published in the journal *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* found that women who cared for infants in cluttered homes experienced higher levels of physical stress than those whose homes were more organized. That study suggests an organized home is a less stressful environment, which itself can pay numerous dividends, as the Mayo Clinic

notes chronic stress increases a person's risk for various health problems, including anxiety, depression, digestive issues,

Consider furniture that doubles as storage. Many people utilize storage furniture so common spaces like living



heart disease, and weight gain, among others.

With so much to gain from an organized home, individuals can consider these strategies to make interior spaces around the house less cluttered.

Avoid procrastinating. A weekly, if not daily, routine that involves cleaning up spaces like the kitchen and living room can ensure a home is not overtaken by clutter before residents even realize it. Each day, go through the mail and discard papers like grocery store circulars and junk mail so they don't pile up. Parents of school-aged children can organize papers kids return home with each day so all that homework and event announcements does not create clutter.

Purchase an entryway shoe rack. It might seem simple, but an entryway shoe rack can set an organized tone in a home. Whether the primary entryway is through the front door or a side door, a shoe rack just inside the door can ensure shoes are not strewn about and reduces the chances that floors are muddied.

rooms are not overwhelmed by clutter. For example, a storage ottoman can hold blankets, pillows and other creature comforts so these rooms project a clutter-free vibe when not in use. Similarly, storage benches at the end of beds in each bedroom can help to establish a serene, clutter-free vibe, which can promote a better night's sleep.

Discard older items. Clutter can pile up when storage areas like closets, dressers, nightstands, and home offices fill up with items people tend to accumulate over the years. For example, a linen closet can be overrun by bath towels that are rarely used, while nightstands can become junk drawers over the years. Periodically go through these areas and discard older items that are no longer used. These tasks won't take long, but can free up ample space throughout the home.

These are just a handful of the many ways individuals can effectively organize their home interiors and reap all the rewards that such efforts produce.




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How to keep kids safe during a home renovation project

Home renovation projects are significant undertakings. Some projects are simple and do not require residents to adjust much, if at all. But larger projects can take several weeks or even months, and such renovations pose a unique challenge, particularly for homeowners who have young children.

Children are curious by nature, and that curiosity can be dangerous during home renovations. Homeowners preparing to renovate their homes can keep

the day contractors arrive, remind the project leader there are kids in the house and request that he or she let staff know there will be curious youngsters around. Contractors can seal off rooms being worked on at the start of each day, and then do so again before leaving for the night. Many contractors have children of their own at home, so if they know youngsters are in the house they might be especially mindful of safety and less likely to leave tools or potentially harmful debris out overnight.

Inform children certain areas are now off limits

Parents can inform and routinely remind children that spaces being renovated are off limits until the project is complete. Explain why it's important that everyone in the house, including adults, must respect this rule. Of course, kids don't always listen to Mom and Dad, so this step likely won't guarantee kids will steer clear of sealed off areas. But explaining to kids why they need to avoid the areas can be more effective than just telling them to avoid project spaces.

Set a good example

It can be tempting to peak in on spaces

being renovated when contractors go home for the day, but parents should know children may be watching them. If you're curious about the progress, ask the project manager to see a space during the day while children are at school. If it's summertime and kids are home, you can still ask, but do so with

your children so they won't think you're being sneaky, which will only add to their curiosity.

Turn off electricity in rooms being renovated when contractors go home

Speak with your contractor and ask if it's alright to turn off the power to rooms being worked on at the end of each day. If so, this can remove the risk of kids sneaking into spaces and turning on power tools at night or getting hurt while poking around exposed electrical wires.

Hire a cleaning service once the project is complete

Once the job is finished, hire a professional cleaning service to clean all areas that were worked on. This increases the chances that small but potentially harmful remnants, such as nails or staples, are gone before kids start using the renovated spaces.

Renovation projects can last for weeks. Parents of small children must take steps to keep curious kids safe while a home is being renovated.



these safety strategies in mind to protect their children during the project.

Let contractors know there are children in the house

Keeping kids safe can be a collective effort that involves homeowners and the contractors working in their homes. On



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Small renovations that make a big impact

Homeowners may think they have to tear down walls or build room extensions to transform their homes with renovation projects. But small projects can yield impressive results, and that's something homeowners working with limited budgets can keep in mind.

There's no shortage of small projects that can change the look and feel of a home. Many of these undertakings can be achieved with a modest investment.

- **Front door replacement:** A new front door instantly improves curb appeal and can make a home more secure and energy-efficient. Painting the existing front door is an even smaller project that still offers appeal.

- **Lighting addition:** Whether a homeowner enlarges a window or adds skylights, natural light can produce incredible results. Investing in new lighting can feel like expanding a space without pushing out walls.

- **Kitchen and bath fixture upgrades:** Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for something a little more modern can unify spaces and provide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

- **Wood floor restoration:** Scuffing and scratches can adversely affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish a floor to

restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.

- **Exterior lighting:** Lighting isn't just important inside. A welcoming glow in the yard is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hard-wired to the circuitry inside the home.

- **Staircase renovation:** Coordinate the staircase to the style in the home with a decorative carpet runner. A secure runner is attractive and can help reduce slipping down the stairs. Tighten shaky railings or replace them while upgrading the stair treads.

- **Interior paint:** Change the color of walls, doors, cabinets, or even furniture with paint. All homeowners need is a paint color that inspires them and a little bit of time.

- **Replace outlet covers:** Upgrade outlet covers with screwless options. Screwless plates for outlets and light switches can make walls look more sleek.

- **Entry organizer installation:** Banish clutter from the home by catching it at the door. An entry organizer with spaces for shoes, coats, backpacks, and shopping bags can be eye-catching and



functional.

- **Carpets cleaning:** Soiled carpets can look drab and dingy. Homeowners can rent carpet-cleaning machines or hire services to revitalize carpets with a deep

cleaning.

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Six reasons to build a retaining wall

Homes are not always located on flat lots. In fact, landscapes can feature hills and valleys, necessitating some extra steps when installing certain features. Retaining walls are often utilized to improve the functionality and safety of a property.

Retaining walls are typically recommended to eliminate soil erosion and improve drainage, says Design One Landscape Corporation. Over time, soil erosion or drainage issues can eat into the structural integrity of a home and cause cosmetic damage and unhealthy conditions, such as mold growth. Here's a look at six instances when installing a retaining wall can be advantageous.

Remedy a slope in the yard

Retaining walls help make sloped areas functional. The wall will help flatten the slope so that water and soil do not flow downward.

Make the yard easier to traverse

A retaining wall can make it easier to walk around a sloped yard. Rather than contending with the hill both uphill and downhill, particularly if it's steep, the retaining wall can be installed to create flat areas that are easier to navigate.

Manage water runoff

Retaining walls can hold back or redirect water to help prevent flooding. A wall can be used to keep water away from the foundation, where it may enter the home.

Prevent soil erosion

Along with keeping water back, the retaining wall also will stop soil erosion and runoff so it doesn't cause an

unsightly condition in the yard, or prove dangerous during severe weather.

Prevent sink holes

By helping to manage water runoff, retaining walls can reduce the risk of sinkholes. According to Slaton Bros, Inc., a retaining wall service provider, sink-



holes occur when enough water pools beneath the surface of the ground to weaken it to the point of not being capable of supporting the ground's surface weight.

Improve curb appeal

Retaining walls also may serve cosmetic functions. They provide additional surfaces upon which to place container plants or additional decorations. Retaining walls also can provide backdrops to shrubs and separate grassy areas from patios or swimming pools.

Retaining walls marry form and function. Homeowners with sloped yards or drainage issues should consider installing retaining walls to address these issues.

Tech upgrades for your home entertainment space

Life in the twenty-first century can feel like it's moving at breakneck speed. Perhaps nowhere is that feeling more pronounced than within the technology sector, where new products are often upstaged by more advanced models, sometimes within a few weeks of an item's initial release.

The speed with which technology advances can make it difficult to keep up. However, it's important to note that software updates can bring devices up to speed in a matter of minutes, often at no cost to users. That can quiet concerns some may have about investing in entertainment room technology. For those ready to move forward with their entertainment room remodel, these tech upgrades can take such spaces to the next level.

New television

Consumers who like to watch television but are not necessarily into what makes certain televisions more suitable to their viewing habits than others may find their heads spinning when they begin their search for a new device. Indeed, the alphabet soup of OLED, QLED, 4K, and other television styles can be difficult to navigate. If confusion reins over your television shopping

trips, it might help to identify what you watch most often and then find the type of TV that most suits your viewing habits. Though opinions vary and consumers should always trust their own eyes, the United Kingdom-based Smart Home Sounds recommends OLED televisions for movie and television lovers as well as gamers who require fast response times. Sports fans may benefit by prioritizing refresh rate when shopping for a new television. Though refresh rate is not the only variable to consider, a faster refresh rate can ensure games don't look fuzzy when the action picks up.

Speaker system

Surround sound can take any entertainment setup to the next level. Modern televisions are slim and that sleek design does not always translate to great built-in sound. Though some recent models feature dramatically improved built-in sound capabilities compared to their slim screen ancestors, a home theater system featuring superior sound is still a must. A home theater surround sound system with subwoofer and Bluetooth connectivity can greatly improve the viewing experience no matter what's on-screen. For consumers working on a tight budget, a soundbar that can be upgraded

with additional surround sound speakers down the road can be a great way to slowly build a theater-like sound system in your living room. When purchasing a surround sound system, consumers also can consider speaker stands that hold larger rear speakers in place.

Lighting

Entertainment room lighting can be easy to overlook, particularly when consumers go down the television and sound system rabbit holes. But the right lighting can set the perfect tone in an entertainment room. The decision of which lighting to go with should include consideration of how the space will (or won't) be used when you aren't watching the latest blockbuster or big game. If the room is exclusively for movies or big

games, then lighting that calls to mind a movie theater, complete with LED strip lights on the walls, is an option worth considering. If the entertaining space is your living room and a space where you're just as likely to read a book as enjoy a family movie night, then recessed lighting in the ceiling with dimmable bulbs allows you to pivot back and forth between lighting schemes depending on how the room is being used at any given moment.

It's easy to get lost when considering tech upgrades for an entertainment room. But pairing the right television with great sound and appropriate lighting can make for a consistently impressive viewing experience.



The benefits of lighting up your landscape

Few home improvements can change the look of a room faster and more affordably than a painting makeover. In fact, homeowners often turn to paint before they make any other renovations. Home Light, a real estate technology company, says painting a home's interior can net a return on investment as high as 107 percent.

Although painting is a project that can be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, there are various advantages to calling in a

professional to handle painting projects. Here is a look at some of the benefits to working with a professional painter.

Cut down on the job time

A professional painter can reduce the project timeline. Painters have the skill set and experience to complete a project in a timely manner. This means the job will be streamlined from preparation to clean-up.

Pay attention to details

Professional painters are likely to do

a job that is nearly flawless, especially after homeowners exercise their due diligence and vet painters carefully. Professionals will pay attention to the small details that less experienced painters wouldn't think about.

Reduce your workload

Painting can be a time-consuming job, and most of it occurs even before you pick up a brush. It can take hours to prep walls, patch holes, remove moldings,

which products will produce the desired results, depending on the wear and tear of the space. Paints are not all created equal, and certain walls, floors and trim may require unique priming and preparation that novices are not familiar with. Professional painters can help ensure durability and save homeowners from having to do the job again in a few months or years.

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and apply painter's tape. Homeowners who do not have much time are better off leaving trusting the project to a professional.

Painters already have equipment

Do-it-yourselfers may need to buy new tools before beginning the job. This means brushes, rollers, tape, tarps, trays, and much more. Unless you plan to paint multiple times, this can make stocking up a considerable investment. Professionals already have all the right gear and tools of the trade.

Lasting results

Professional painters understand

Painting can be a challenging job when it involves painting hard-to-reach spaces and/or climbing and balancing on tall ladders. Homeowners are not at risk of injury when hiring a professional painter. In addition, professional painters should be licensed and insured. This means if an injury or incident occurs, the homeowner will not be on the hook for the cost.

A fresh coat of paint can produce amazing results. Leaving the work to a professional can ensure a job is done correctly and beautifully and completed on time.



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Why hiring a painter is the right choice

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Popular types of lighting that can complete home decor

Many components come together to create a home interior that is welcoming and comfortable. Lighting is an important part of any design and plays a key role in home decor. Lighting can change the atmosphere of a room with the flip of a switch. Through lighting, one can make a space seem more cozy, or even make small spaces seem more expansive.

Homeowners should not underestimate the power of lighting in their homes. In addition to making spaces functional and more attractive, lighting can affect personal well-being, as a well-lit room can benefit mental health. The following are various types of lighting and how they can work best in a home.

Ambient

Ambient lighting is blanket lighting that is used to evenly illuminate a room. Lowes Home Improvement says this is the general lighting that every home needs. Fixtures like overhead lights, floor lamps and more provide enough light for people to function safely indoors. Ambient lighting is the foundation for every interior lighting scenario, and ambient lighting fixtures should be featured toward the center of the room and closer to the ceiling to disperse light more efficiently.

Task lighting

The home improvement firm Hiller describes task lighting as lighting directed toward a specific area to give more detail to objects. Close-range work such as crafting, reading, cooking, and desk



Decorative lighting

Decorative lighting is used exclusively for aesthetic purposes, according to BLOCC House of Interiors. It adds style and drama to spaces. Decorative lighting fixtures include pendants, sconces, chandeliers, and more. Decorative lighting also may be whimsical, such as fairy lights strung in a child's bedroom or neon lights in a home bar or sports room.

Separately, these lighting options may not be enough to suit your needs. But when combined, these types of lighting help to establish an interesting and functional home interior design that fits with a person's lifestyle and needs.

Accent lighting

Lowes indicates that accent lighting balances lighting and spotlights certain points in a space. For example, accent lighting can be utilized to highlight collectibles or artwork. Accent lighting may call attention to entryways, plants, fireplaces, or other points. Accent lighting typically adds character to a room and is not necessarily bright enough to sufficiently illuminate a space.



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Moving forward

Work in the Vintage Hill 4th Addition has begun. Lots are being sold by Arrowhead Development and Wayne native Shane Baack. The development is located just south of 21st Street and east of Claycomb Road. Dirt work has been done for the 27 lots and construction on homes is set to begin this year.



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How to prepare outdoor spaces for Memorial Day entertaining

Memorial Day weekend is a popular time to entertain. For many, the weekend marks the first outdoor entertaining opportunity of the year, which is certainly something to look forward to.

As outdoor entertaining season begins, homeowners can take these steps to prepare their outdoor living spaces for the first big backyard get-together of the year.

Break out the power washer

Pressure washing is an important component of spring home cleanup. The warmer temperatures of spring allow

water from power washing to dry more quickly, which can decrease the chances that mold and mildew will grow on surfaces like siding. A freshly power washed home also makes for a welcoming entertaining space. A power washer also can be used on outdoor entertaining spaces to remove dirt and debris that built up over the winter. Just make sure to read manufacturer instructions before using a power washer to clean paving stones, decks and outdoor furniture.

Inspect outdoor furniture

Now is a good time to inspect outdoor



furniture if the task was not performed in late fall or early winter before items were moved into the garage or placed in storage. Check to make sure furnishings are still safe to use, addressing any issues before guests come over for a Memorial Day weekend gathering. Wash cushions for outdoor furniture and replace any that might be showing their age.

Clean the grill

A thorough cleaning of the grill also is in order prior to summer entertaining season. Many homeowners do little or no grilling during winter, so now is the time to give grilling surfaces and the interior of the grill a deep cleaning. Check for leaks if using a gas grill, and scrub the interior of any grease that accumulated last season. Many grilling experts advise lighting a grill and letting it burn for roughly 20 minutes

prior to putting any foods on the grates for the first time. Such a strategy allows residual fluids like soap, vinegar and de-greasing products used when cleaning the grill to burn off before food is placed on the grates.

Inspect the landscaping, too

It's not just seating areas like patios and decks that need some investigation prior to outdoor entertaining season. Take a walk around the landscape and make sure there's no potentially dangerous spots where people could be injured when playing backyard games. Fill in any holes with soil and fresh grass seed, and inspect trees to see if any branches need to be pruned.

Summer entertaining season begins each Memorial Day weekend. Homeowners can take various steps to ensure their outdoor entertaining spaces are comfortable and safe.

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Home interior trends on the rise

Trends that seem ubiquitous one day can seemingly vanish before the sun rises again just 24 hours later. That's especially true in the digital age, when overnight celebrities and viral videos can be on the tips of everyone's tongue before being forgotten entirely when the next online sensation emerges in an increasingly rapid news cycle.

Home trends typically benefit from a longer shelf life than viral videos and other fads that originate on the internet, and that's something renovation-minded homeowners should consider when improving their homes. Homeowners preparing to do just that can consider these notable trends, which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

- **Rounded furnishings**

Houzz noted that gentle curves and rounded edges embody the organic modern styles that many current homeowners love. Rounded dining tables and similarly circular coffee tables may merit consideration among homeowners who want to embrace popular trends.

- **Arches**

Houzz cites arches among the more popular modern trends, and the experts at Better Homes & Gardens note this unique, eye-catching style has been gaining popularity for several years. Better Homes & Gardens suggests that part of the appeal of arched doorways could be their deviation from a more traditional door shape. That uniqueness draws the attention of residents and visitors alike, and Houzz notes that arched windows, cabinets and even millwork details are part of the pivot toward arches.

- **Stove alcoves**

If it's a touch of history homeowners want, kitchen range alcoves might be just the project for them. Range alcoves call an earlier time to mind when wood burning stoves were commonplace. The report from Houzz notes range alcoves immediately draw attention, which



undoubtedly adds to their appeal.

- **Wood for warmth**

Homeowners who hear "wood and warmth" might think fireplaces, but Houzz reports that wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means to giving homes a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling, and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home.

Trends come and go, but home trends typically have more staying power than styles that emerge in other arenas. Homeowners who want to upgrade their home interiors can consider the latest trends and choose those that align with their own personal tastes.

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Grow smarter with new season of 'Backyard Farmer'

"Backyard Farmer" is back for its 73rd season to help gardeners and lawn care enthusiasts keep their landscapes healthy and thriving. The new season premiered April 3 on Nebraska Public Media.

Host Kim Todd, Nebraska Extension landscape horticulture specialist, joins a panel of Nebraska Extension experts and other horticulture professionals to answer viewer questions about insect pests, plant diseases, lawn care, fruits and vegetables, and landscape design.

This season, the "Backyard Farmer" team will bring back sample presentations, where panelists showcase insects, turf issues, products or a diseased plant to help viewers identify and solve common lawn and garden problems.

There also are plans for a remote episode recorded in north central Nebraska and at the Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island in August.

Viewers can submit their lawn and garden questions and photos via



Kim Todd, Kyle Koch, Roch Gaussoin, Loren Giesler, Kelly Feehan (Left to Right). Backyard Farmer is a co-production between Nebraska Extension and Nebraska Public Media.

e-mail or Facebook messages. To submit a question or photo for the experts, email byf@unl.edu or visit Facebook at facebook.com/backyardfarmernebraska.

The updated "Backyard Farmer" website at byf.unl.edu features more news about the series and its Facebook page also includes announcements and other garden information. In addition, past features and episodes are available for viewing on the program's YouTube channel at youtube.com/backyardfarmer and as a free podcast.

Fans of "Backyard Farmer" can also stay up to date with the latest gardening trends by signing up for a new monthly newsletter from the series at byf.unl.edu/about/newsletter.

The longest running, locally produced television series in the nation, "Backyard Farmer" airs on Nebraska Public Media Thursdays at 7 p.m. through September. It repeats at 10 a.m. CT Saturdays on Nebraska Public Media and at 4 p.m. Sundays and 5 p.m. Mondays on Create.

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Did you know?

Home renovations are wildly popular, and that popularity can be traced to a number of factors. Some homeowners renovate their homes with their own comfort in mind, while others do so to improve the resale value of the property. For those in the latter group, a recognition of renovations that yield the highest return on investment may help them decide which projects to pursue. According to the housing market research and analytics firm Zonda Media, a garage door replacement offered the highest return on investment in the American real estate market in 2024, earning a whopping 194 percent return on homeowners' initial investment. An entry door replacement with steel door offered the second best ROI at 188 percent of homeowners' initial investment, while replacing siding with stone veneer was third on the list with an average ROI of 153 percent.

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