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## CONFUSED ABOUT WHERE TO BEGIN YOUR HOME REMODELING?

DEHAVAN, WI--“Honey, what if . . .?” is usually the first sign that your home just isn’t meeting all your needs anymore. According to Chris Stebnitz, Sales Manager of Stebnitz Builders in Delavan, remodeling is a great way to help you and your home get along better. “Families, their habits and hobbies, change over the years, and remodeling is a cost-effective strategy to help your home meet your new needs.”

So, where do you start? “Try to pinpoint what’s really bothering you about the house. Much like an illness, a careful diagnosis leads to the best treatment,” advises Stebnitz. Common complaints include a kitchen that doesn’t accommodate today’s modern appliances or cooking styles, a growing family that needs space for new members or more privacy, a new hobby or interest in entertaining.” Whatever it is, you can clarify the problem by keeping a notebook on the counter to note both irritations and possible ideas.

Next, start to collect ideas. The easiest exploration is by taking a closer look at friends’ and relatives’ homes. “This gives you a chance to try things out and imagine how it might work in your home and life. Helping in the kitchen, sharing a holiday meal or being a houseguest lets you experience what you like or don’t like.” Go a step beyond by visiting Parades of Homes, or just browsing new homes in your area.

There are also a myriad of mass media opportunities to investigate design and building trends. “I recommend delving into everything with an open mind. There are so many changes in the design world that you may be surprised by the latest ideas, or how your taste has changed over the years,” Stebnitz notes. Idea-generating magazines he recommends include: *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Architectural Digest*, *Builder Magazine*, *Martha Stewart Living*, *Dwell*, *House and Garden*, *House Beautiful* and *Metropolitan Home*. Or, type “Home Design” in your browser and settle back to click and collect ideas. “Along with the “what’s bothering you” notebook, keep a folder to collect pictures from magazines or the Web,” offers Stebnitz. “Systematically gathering ideas helps people start to focus on what they like.”

Then, it’s time for a reality check. Once you have the ideas, contact a professional to explore your home’s potential. Qualified contractors will conduct a Feasibility Walkthrough to help homeowners understand *what* can be done and *how* it can be done. “We know that every home has a design opportunity hidden within, and these Feasibility Walkthroughs, which are really listening and investigation sessions, are the best way to discover it.”

Feasibility Walkthroughs start with a conversation between the builder and the owners about what’s wrong with the house. “Your homework pays off by saving you planning time. The more specifically the

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homeowner can describe the pain, the sooner we can start to whittle down the ideas to pose some remedies,” emphasizes Stebnitz. Beyond just measuring, a thorough Feasibility Walkthrough requires an inspection of the walls and structure, documenting age and details. Heating and cooling, plumbing and electrical systems should be evaluated to gauge whether these systems’ capacities can support the proposed changes. “Every house is different; every job is different; we use this foundation information to help determine the possibilities,” notes Stebnitz.

Since homeowners may only undertake one or two remodeling projects in their lifetimes, there are many misconceptions about remodeling that can be addressed during a Feasibility Walkthrough. One of the most common misconceptions is “Let’s just put on an addition.” The reality is, all communities have zoning requirements, and some homes, such as lake homes, have additional requirements mandated by the Department of Natural Resources.

“Let’s build a bedroom in the basement to give our teen a little more privacy. (And us, too!)” Lower-level bedrooms are a common request, Stebnitz finds, and most people are unaware that by law, these bedrooms require an emergency exit to prevent injury or even death in the case of a fire. “This is a critical safety requirement. Even if homeowners want to use the room for an office, if there’s a remote chance someone might sleep in the room, reputable builders will encourage installing an egress window. It’s a small investment when compared to the value of a life.”

Another myth is that remodeling can’t be done in the winter. “There are very few projects that can’t be done in the winter,” assures Stebnitz. He adds, “Thanks to this myth, winter can be a great time to start a project because workloads can be lighter.”

“Let’s just move that wall, and we’ll finally have enough room.” A wall isn’t just a wall in all situations, cautions Stebnitz. “During the Feasibility Walkthrough, the wall will be examined to see whether it’s a critical part of the home’s structure, known as a load-bearing wall, or whether there are heating and cooling ducts or any electrical or plumbing lines running through it.” These attributes don’t make it impossible to move the wall; they just need to be accounted for in the plan.

The best thing you can do before remodeling is to define the existing problem with your house, explore a few ideas about how you’d like it to be better and contact a qualified contractor to conduct a feasibility walkthrough with you to discuss your project. If you have questions about remodeling, contact the Lakeland Builders Association (LBA) at 262/723-2908 or LBA member Stebnitz Builders at 262/728-8027.

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