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Holding her baby, Aerin Leonard, 8 months, homeowner Alison McBain discusses her new kitchen plan with Skip Wyatt, owner and CEO of Mr. Handyman and H.M. Remodeling of Greater Fairfield County, at her home in Fairfield.

HANDYMEN

Home repairs bring plenty of business

Expanded service from handyman takes advantage of homeowners' growing needs

By Cindy Simoneau

FAIRFIELD — The deck needs staining, the fireplace mantel needs replacing, the bathroom needs new tile and there are many minor repair projects that need tending.

As every property owner knows, the joy of owning a home or condominium is soon dashed by the seemingly endless list of changes or repairs that are often beyond the scope of many people. The plaintive plea is soon for a handyman to solve all issues. Mr. Handyman, at 2480 Black Rock Turnpike, has been one of those go-to businesses since 2004 offering many forms of assistance.

Based on its success at this level of service, and demand by its clients for repeat and expanded service, franchise owner Lorenzo "Skip" Wyatt has taken the next step and created HM Remodeling to meet more-expensive customer needs in Fairfield and Westchester counties.

Mr. Handyman of Fairfield is one of only two franchises — the other in South Bend, Ind. — in the nation to expand its services. There are more than 200 Mr. Handyman franchises in North America, according to Katherine Boncher, of Fishman Public Relations, who works with the company.

Wyatt said the new business, officially started in April, has already begun serving repeat clients as well



Technician Doug Beardsley of Mr. Handyman and H.M. Remodeling of Greater Fairfield County, works on installing a new kitchen in a home in Fairfield on Wednesday.

as new ones.

"There are so many couples today, both husband and wife, who are working. And with the aging population in the area, we knew there was a growing need for home improvement help," Wyatt said. "With a healthy customer base from repeat handyman work, we also knew there was a demand for additional remodeling services.

"We already had the reputation for quality work. So all we needed to do to succeed was show our clients we could continue the same high level of service in the remodeling realm," he said.

Wyatt said that most of the company's 11 technicians are contractors with the skill sets, and decades of experience, to complete the remodel-

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eling requests, but with the business' then-limited scope, there was a need to expand.

Taking risks in business is not new ground for Wyatt, who spent 30 years working his way up the corporate ladder at IBM before deciding to embrace an entrepreneurial desire.

"I was 51 at the time, and I always wanted to own my own business. I only needed to find what I

wanted to do," said Wyatt, a Westport resident. So, he bought into the Mr. Handyman franchise, eventually taking over and running it himself when he took early retirement from IBM.

"I guess I was always searching for a personal challenge. I wanted to put my many years of experience to work building a business. Now I'm busy 24-7. In many ways it's more demanding than a job in corporate America. I'm building something here and creating value for

the stakeholders," he said.

Wyatt, at "65-something," said he does not have an exit plan now that the remodeling business has taken off.

One of the keys to the new remodeling service is that the company offers staff designers to help customers plan their remodeling jobs and follow through for them with contractors and any outside specialists hired to complete the renovation or expansion.

"The design consultants listen to what the custom-

er wants, plans it out and make sure it happens to their specifications," Wyatt said. "That really helps the customer have peace of mind that they don't have to oversee the details. With very busy lives, this is a key issue."

The designers also work with the tile and cabinet companies to ensure materials are correct and the job is on time. They also keep tabs on the project's bottom line to keep the property owner and contractor informed of adjustments as needed.

"One key factor about our staff is that we have already vetted all these individuals and know they are reliable," he said.

Wyatt does not view other contractor services or commercial companies as his competitors — instead it's the individual property owner who heads off to Home Depot thinking they have the time or the know-how to take on a job.

"We end up having to correct a lot of issues that were created simply because people don't have

the time, training or background to see the job to the end. Watching it on TV and doing it yourself are miles apart," Wyatt said.

Costs for the service encompass planning to completion. "Our costs are very competitive," he said.

With the robust real estate markets in the two core counties, Wyatt envisions more demand for remodeling services.

"Everyone wants to put their own touch on their home. That's where we step in," he said.