

COMMENTARY



Allen Norwood

A reminder for fans of HomeArama

A quick reminder that we'll draw names on Wednesday in our HomeArama Readers' Choice contest. Six lucky readers and their guests will be invited to the invitation-only HomeArama preview party, enjoy the food and festivities, and rate the five showhouses.

So, if you haven't entered, send me an e-mail or drop me a note to the addresses below. Please, no phone calls.

The party is May 14. Be sure you can attend if you win. The annual new-home showcase, hosted by the Home Builders Association of Charlotte, opens the next day in Heydon Hall off Park Road.

If you'd like to help out at HomeArama, the Providence High School Band Boosters are again seeking volunteer greeters. If you participate, you'll welcome show visitors to the homes - and receive a free pass to use whenever you choose. Call Sandy Riehl at (704) 846-3694.

Careful around pine straw

A Charlotte reader writes to remind everybody that pine straw used in landscaping can be a fire hazard if you're careless with cigarettes and charcoal grill ashes.

Indeed, says Charlotte Fire Marshal Bart Massey, the reader's alert is especially timely.

Pine straw was a "contributing factor" in a couple of fires recently at the Lake Point Apartments in Charlotte. And there was a recent fire in Pineville caused by a discarded cigarette.

The fire marshal's office is working with the Charlotte Apartment Association to raise awareness of the potential danger. "They should... keep straw away from walls where they have combustible siding," Massey said.

A timely warning for the rest of us, too.

Impact fee - or not?

Interesting reaction in the construction community to Centex's decision to contribute \$500 per house for a school, to smooth rezoning for a proposed 1,300-home neighborhood called Stone Creek Ranch, off Providence Road near I-485.

Officially, of course, builders and developers don't like what are called impact fees. It's a hot button across the country.

Unofficially, well...

One developer told me in a casual conversation that he would prefer predictable fees to the wildly unpredictable costs resulting from site-by-site negotiations over improvements such as roads.

When I shared that with Todd Harrison, director of land acquisition for Centex, he showed me a copy of a letter written by a leader of the Real Estate and Building Industry Coalition, a local lobbying group. The letter points out that the money can be used only for one elementary school adjacent to the 448-acre tract. So, the author says, the contribution isn't an impact fee "per se."

To my layman's eye, the agreement looks very much like the typical deal to provide a turn lane or some such.

And, as those on both sides suggest, very much like a precedent.

City Council's zoning hearing begins about 6 p.m. Monday at the Government Center, 600 E. Fourth St.

For information on the development, visit www.centex-stonecreekranch.com.

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◀ **DISPLAY YOUR TREASURES** | 4H
Easy-to-build curio coffee table protects collectibles under glass

SELL FIRST, THEN BUY | 10H
It's still usually best if you sell existing home before buying another



PAT SHANKLIN - PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

A rubbed-and-crackled finish highlights cabinets in the kitchen (above). Exposed beams in the ceiling add to the cottage look.

In the great room (left) the fireplace is flanked by knotty alder bookcases. Corbels under the mantel are antiques.

If you're going

What: "Heart and Home," the annual showhouse to benefit the March of Dimes.

When: Next Friday through June 6. Hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursdays, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Fridays, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays, noon-6 p.m. Sundays.

Where: 7104 Fairway Vista Drive, in the Stonecroft neighborhood at Colony and Rea roads in southeast Charlotte.

Admission: Advance tickets are \$8, available with VIC card at the Harris Teeter stores at 823 Colony Road and 4100 Carmel Road. Tickets at the door are \$10. The house is available for private parties and corporate outings; call (704) 377-2009.

BY TISH SIGNET
Special to the Observer

Designer Robbie Warren began work on the March of Dimes showhouse with a clear vision: The "Heart and Home" tour would feature an English country cottage reflecting the British heritage of Pete and Louise Leeke, whose Kingswood Homes built the house.

The house would feel like a place where generations of a sophisticated, well-traveled family display collected treasures and elegantly celebrate such milestones as births and weddings.

"Ideally it would feel like we plucked an entire cottage from the English countryside and reconstructed it here," Warren said.

And, in keeping with the March of Dimes' commitment to children, this should be a family home with spectacular kid-friendly spaces. A Peter Pan theme quickly surfaced for children's areas. This is, after all, the 100th anniversary of the beloved children's book by British writer J.M. Barrie and the 50th anniversary of the Disney animation.

Wall murals capture magical moments in the story, and bedrooms are named for the children who flew away with Peter to Neverland.

The showhouse, designed by Christopher Phelps and Associates, opens next Friday. After debut weekend, it's open Thursday through Sunday through June 6. It's at 7104 Fairview Vista Drive in Stonecroft, site of last year's March of Dimes showhouse and 2001's HomeArama.

SEE MARCH OF DIMES | 3H

Comfortable, elegant and oh-so-British

On March of Dimes tour, you'll step into a Tudor-style country cottage - with a Peter Pan theme for the kids

QuickFix

HOW-TO ADVICE YOU CAN USE BY HOME EDITOR ALLEN NORWOOD

Q How can we unstick a window that's been painted shut, so we can paint our house?

A Carefully. Seriously, you can do it if you take your time and are careful with that hammer.

STEP ONE

First, use a utility knife or stiff putty knife to slice the paint film between the sash and frame, all the way around the sash you're trying to free.



STEP TWO

Outside, be sure to slide your putty knife between the bottom rail of the sash and window sill and pry gently. That's a common problem area.



STEP THREE

If that doesn't work, put a small block of wood against the stile - the vertical part of the sash - and tap gently with a hammer. Move block, and tap at different spots.



STEP FOUR

Sometimes it helps to put the block on the upper corners of the inside sash, and tap gently downward. Do it on both corners, using equal force.



GEORGE BREISACHER - ILLUSTRATIONS SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

TIP To keep the sash from sticking after you paint, move the sash several times as the paint dries. Lubricating the channel the sash slides in helps, too.

Have a home-care question, or a suggestion for a helpful tip? Contact Allen Norwood: anorwood@charlotteobserver.com or (704) 358-5237.