

## Do this before finishing that basement

ASHLEE COFFEY

ACOFFEY@NONPAREILONLINE.COM

Spring is just around the corner - and that means the start of new home projects.

For some people, that means finally getting started on finishing that basement project they've been putting off. Here are some tips for those looking to start a basement project in the near future.

The first step, according to Jeremy Seier, total basement finish production manager at Thrasher Basement Systems Inc. in Omaha, is looking at the house's foundation.

"The first thing we do is make sure the foundation is in good shape and there are no issues as far as cracks, bowing or settlement going on," he said. "Those issues need to be addressed to start off. There's a common misconception that all basement problems are really expensive but that's not always true. Some are very minor but should be taken care of beforehand."

The next step is figuring out a game plan for the basement. Seier said people should keep in mind what they're wanting to use the finished space for, whether it's a place to put an extra bedroom or two, another bathroom, a storage area or an open "living room" area. What a person decides will greatly affect the cost of the project.

"If you're putting in more bedrooms, the more materials you'll have to use and the more expensive it gets," Seier said. "If you're planning on putting a bathroom in and have existing plumbing rough-ins downstairs, it's a lot easier to put that bathroom in. If you don't, it's a bigger process to install the plumbing."

The next step involves looking at any moisture issues commonly seen in basements. These include domestic leaks from toilets or broken water pipes and can result in condensation and mold on or in walls, insulation and under flooring.

"On a national average, a basement will have a domestic leak once every seven years," Seier said. "It happens more than people think - so consider the materials you're putting in the basement. You want to fin-



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**Homeowners looking to finish their basement can visit the basement show room at Thrasher Basement Systems in Omaha for ideas to create the perfect living area. But before finishing can be started, homeowners should be aware of foundation, moisture and radon issues in a basement. These types of issues should be fixed first, experts at Thrasher say.**

ish (a basement) once. You don't want to have to go back and refinish it after it gets wet."

In addition to domestic leaks, moisture issues are also caused by rain water, as well as directly from the ground.

Seier said basements have a "stack effect," which happens when hot air leaves a home and, inadvertently, new air is pulled back up through the basement, which brings with it moisture from the ground.

Moisture issues greatly influ-

ence the types of materials used in finishing a basement. The "musty" smell sometimes associated with basements can come from the breakdown of organic materials, such as wood and drywall. Seier suggests using metal studs and inorganic materials, such as ceramic composite concrete instead of drywall. This is similar to drywall in that it's half an inch thick and can be purchased as paintable or pre-finished panels. He also suggests using a type of polyvinyl chloride (or PVC) as basement trim instead of wood and a closed cell insulation such as SilverGlo, which is resistant to water, mold, termites and fire. Homeowners can also buy different types of raised floor tiles to reduce the amount of moisture trapped under the floor.

Another way to help reduce moisture issues is to invest in a dehumidification system, such as the SaniDry Basement Dehumidifier.

Seier said homes not only pull in moisture but radon as well - so it's also important to have a radon test performed in a home.

Radon, which is a radioactive colorless, odorless and tasteless gas, is caused by the natural breakdown of uranium and thorium in the ground, Seier said. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends basements be checked for radon once every two years. Radon test kits can be purchased commercially at places such as Lowe's or Home Depot.

"The EPA recommends you

keep basements below four picocuries," he said. "If it's above a four, they recommend putting a mitigation system in. That includes coring a hole in the concrete, putting a piece of PVC down and hooking it to a fan that constantly pumps air out of the home. It pulls the radon gas from underneath the house before it can get in the house."

Thrasher Basement provides free, in-home consultations to assist in radon removal and radon mitigation for homes. The company also has radon technicians to install radon mitigation systems.

Overall, creating a beauti-

fully finished basement that will stand the test of time is dependent on taking care of and fixing issues regarding foundation, moisture and radon testing first. Once these are safely taken care of, the possibilities for a basement - including design, set-up, electricity and lighting - are endless, Seier said.

"Take care of those issues first - especially moisture issues - before you finish," Seier said. "It's important to protect the investment you're making."

For more information on finishing a basement, visit thrasherbasement.com or call (402) 393-8803.

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