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**Local spotlight**

## Handyman business nails service, quality

Firm has 5 franchises, aims for 100

By Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News



**HandyPro offers customers a \$30 discount if the contractor doesn't call or come at the appointment time. Jeff Noel, left, and Mark Caudill work for HandyPro.**

**PLYMOUTH** — Providing a cadre of handymen who arrive when they say they will and do what they are asked to do at a fair price may not sound revolutionary, but it has been the secret to success for HandyPro.

The Plymouth-based service company is recording \$1.2 million in annual sales, including its five franchises. The owners are aiming for 100 stores in the next decade.

“The biggest frustration customers told us was that contractors came late, even a day later than they said they would come,” said co-owner Keith Paul, whose company has serviced over 15,000 homeowners in southeast Michigan. They offer a \$30 discount if the contractor doesn't call or come at the appointment time.

HandyPro supplies nearly any kind of home care from carpentry, drywall and painting to tiling, remodeling and insurance reclamation. Most of the customers have assorted tasks, or to-do lists. They pay a minimum fee of \$62. The workers wear uniforms, offer money-back guarantees and come bonded and insured.

“They do fine work for us,” said Pamela Cortese of Canton. She commissioned HandyPro to help build a stained-glass studio in her basement. “The carpentry work is especially good.”

### HandyPro

\* Specialty --  
Plymouth-based HandyPro recorded \$758,000 worth of light construction jobs in 2003 with 13 employees. Adding the sales from all five franchises boosted revenue in 2003 to \$1.2 million.

\* Owners -- Keith and Debra Paul started the business in 1993 as a home-based referral service.

\* Contact --  
[www.handypro.com](http://www.handypro.com) or  
call (800) 942-6394.

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With franchises in Minneapolis, Honolulu, Dallas, St. Clair Shores and Ann Arbor, Paul, 36, remembers how his entrepreneurial dream started in 1992. That year, he dropped out of Eastern Michigan University because he was too impatient to spend time in a classroom with ideas abuzz in his head.

He opened a take-out independent pizza service in Garden City. But, within a year, Little Caesar and Pizza Hut opened outlets within a mile of his business. He and his wife, Debra, searched for the kind of entrepreneurial venture they could grow into a formidable enterprise.

Then Debra's grandmother complained she was overcharged \$2,000 for installation of kitchen cabinets. The Paul's researched the problem and found homeowners had universal complaints about shoddy work, fraudulent contractors, irregular time schedules and sloppiness.

By 1996, the Paul's opened a franchise in Plymouth. They added their first franchise in Ann Arbor in 2001.

"I was a single mom who found it difficult to get reliable contractors for home repairs. I saw a lot of value in the franchise," said Janine Decker, owner of the Ann Arbor store.

Competition comes from [Home Depot](#), which provides installers for products purchased at its store, Ann Arbor-based HomeRun Services Inc. and home repair contractors.

Decker says the advantage of an independent handyman is that he can do more than install the new door. In the same visit, he can change a lighting fixture and fix a leaky toilet.

Knowing the kind of contractor that took advantage of his grandmother-in-law continues to pounce on unsuspecting homeowners, Paul is an active member of the Better Business Bureau's Customer Assurance Program. He hopes to upgrade the profession for both consumers and contractors.

"If a worker breaks a \$10,000 chandelier while painting the ceiling, who covers the liability?," he asked.

He insists on licensing and warranties to assure quality work and insurance to protect the laborers. Workers compensation assures a steady income stream if an employee falls off a ladder on the job.

What do the Paul's want to happen? He envisions 100 franchises around the country.  
*Maureen McDonald is a Metro Detroit free-lance writer.*