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Childproofing homes keeps kids safe, parents at ease, interior decorations in tact

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LOUISVILLE - When the Talusani family moved into a new house in Longmont, they wanted to make sure it was safe for 1-year-old Mira and 5-year-old Daphne.

Although the couple had made efforts to childproof their prior home, they sought a more comprehensive and professional approach to keeping the children safe. So they hired Colorado Childproofers LLC to evaluate the home and make recommendations for specific hardware and installation.

The Louisville-based business started in January and already has childproofed more than 200 homes in the area, says Louie Delaware, owner. "We see things that parents don't because we are doing childproofing all the time. We have easy solutions for things they may struggle with."

Delaware, who has a mechanical engineering degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison and a master's degree from the University of Colorado, had previously worked for 22 years managing research and development for a medical device company. A licensed contractor, he also started a business doing handyman services and general contracting work.

"I found that there weren't any other childproofers in the area," he says. "There are handymen, but no one who takes it from fully understanding what needs to be done to keep children safe." He joined the International Association for Child Safety, which promotes professionals who create a safe home environment.

A lot of parents are not aware of hazards, he explains. For example, if a child pulls out a dresser drawer in an attempt to grab a toy, the dresser could fall on top of the child with catastrophic results. Delaware recommends tethering unstable furniture to walls. Parents should also pay close attention to window safety, he adds.

Delaware works with his wife, Judy, a pediatric occupational therapist who helps with marketing, sales and trade shows.

Marketing includes advertisements in the Yellow Pages, parent-oriented magazines, and paying for placements on Google, Yahoo and MSN search engines. To get the word out about his service, he also provides community service presentations on child safety at area nonprofit organizations. The company also has a Web site, www.coloradochildproofers.com.

Delaware charges about \$80 per hour for a survey, a flat rate for materials and an hourly rate for labor. Typically, a house installation may range from \$500 to \$1,000 depending on size and complexity of the home. He declined to disclose revenues.

"On average it will take a family at least 20 hours to childproof the house. We can get it done in six to eight hours. We don't like to damage the house and use specially designed clamps to go around posts for gates. When it comes time to take the gate down it looks like new," he says. He has childproofed houses ranging from 1,200 square feet to large mansions.

Some clients simply are looking for advice on what should be done and what equipment they can install themselves. He often recommends latches for kitchen, bathrooms and laundry rooms, as well as outlet cover plates that have spring shutters, door stops and toilet locks.

For the Talusanis the service eased anxiety and saved time. "After the first baby, we tried to find someone to childproof the house," Dana Talusani says. The couple tried to install safety latches with mixed success. With a second child rapidly reaching mobility, Talusani says she was excited to find out about Delaware.

"Louie came and spent more than an hour in the house on the initial visit," Talusani says. "What I liked was he pointed out trouble or dangerous areas as he walked around the house. He got back to me with a 24-hour period with an estimate detailing his recommendations."

Since the Talusanis purchased a newly constructed home, it was important for them to maintain the integrity of the custom cabinets and new drywall. "Louie was able to install safety gates and locks and keep the design of the house," she says. He devised a way to mount a safety gate on panels so the drywall isn't damaged.

Delaware also fixed cords from blinds, window locks and sliding glass doors to prevent entry as well as pinched fingers. "He just wasn't looking out for the baby, but pointed out situations where Daphne could still get into trouble such as doors slamming into little hands."

Mindy Wilson of Boulder first considered the idea of a child safety professional when visiting family in Boston. She found Colorado Childproofers through the Internet.

"We are pleased. He came in and did in six hours what it would have taken my husband three months of weekends to do. He found things you wouldn't think about until there is a problem," she says. Delaware installed gates at the top and bottom of both flights of stairs, safety locks on cabinets and the oven just before their son started walking.

Wilson says she plans to have Delaware childproof their condominium in the mountains this winter.

Keeping toddlers safe during holidays

Holiday activities and decorations may come with unintended hazards. Take some time to prevent accident or injuries. Colorado Childproofers recommends:

- _ Always keep candles, matches and lighters out of reach and away from trees, curtains, presents and a child's clothing.
- _ Make certain that the Christmas tree is stable. Tether if necessary. Place the tree away from fireplaces, radiators and furnace vents.
- _ Be sure all larger incandescent lights are fully screwed into their sockets, which are just the right size for a toddler's finger. Check for signs of broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires. Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- _ Keep electrical plugs safely away from the probing fingers of children, and make sure they cannot pull the light cords out of the wall. Use sliding outlet cover plates to childproof the outlets.
- _ Use only flame-resistant, nonbreakable ornaments with no sharp corners. Don't use real food for strings on the tree. Avoid using tinsel.
- _ Watch for dangling tablecloths. Children can easily grab them and pull the contents of the table top onto themselves.
- _ The berries of mistletoe and holly are poisonous. Keep them out of reach.
- _ Holiday candies and nuts - even gift wrap - could pose a choking hazard.
- _ Always supervise children when a fireplace is in use.
- _ Keep alcoholic beverages out of a child's reach, since even small amounts of can be toxic. Make sure if any holiday guests bring medication that it is keep in a secure spot, not accessible by children.
- _ If you visit a home that's not childproofed, be extra vigilant.

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