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Cape builders group to walk homeowners through construction process

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Series of public workshops aimed at avoiding costly remodeling mistakes

A home renovation or building project is something most homeowners will go through only once or twice in their lifetime — so the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Cape Cod is holding a series of classes to help make the experience more efficient.

Starting Sept. 20, the association will hold an eight-week class, Building Blocks, that will cover various topics of the building, remodeling and design process. Christine Duren, the association's executive director, said the sessions are designed to take homeowners from the start of building a new home all the way to the finishing touches of landscaping, hitting all points in between.

"Because we're the subject matter experts, we felt it would really help the homeowner make their decisions," she said. "It makes sense to give them some tools to make better, wiser and more efficient decisions and understand the process."

The eight sessions, held in partnership with the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce, can be taken as a group or individually, Duren said, and are open not only to homeowners but to renters and anyone thinking of buying or renting a house in the future.

The public workshops are a departure for the association, which focuses mostly on professional development and continuing education for its more than 300 company members. But Amy Britton, owner of Artisan Kitchens in Osterville and a certified kitchen designer, said she brought the idea for the class to Duren after years of working with people remodeling their homes and seeing common, recurring problems.

"For most people, it's their one and only time that they're going through this," said Britton, who also will be a presenter for the class. "They don't know the process, nor should they. It's not something they're experts in. But knowledge is power, and if they

have some guidance and knowledge, it's going to help everything go smoothly and help them avoid costly mistakes."

April Ducott, senior project manager at Cape Associates and another presenter in the Building Blocks series, said the workshops will give attendees insight into the contractor's world and what they wish homeowners knew before the process began.

"One of the biggest challenges for us is people come in and don't have a real plan," she said. "If they went to their town's building department and asked for the files on their property location, they might be able to find out in advance that they can't add another bedroom without upgrading the septic, for example. A little bit of legwork with the town would prepare them to send us off in the right direction.

"People who are educated are always a little bit easier to work with," Ducott said. "They have expectations, and they know how this goes. Everyone uses Google, but sometimes having the history of going down that road in the past prepares them."

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