

Ask Jon Eakes

Jon Eakes & the Singing Nuns of St. Michael's Convent

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THE DEAL I made a deal with the singing nuns of St. Michaels convent in Spokane Washington : If they would teach me how to sing, I would teach them how to repair their convent.

My only dissapointment in this large project with HGTV Canada was that they never promoted the show well and they refused to ever bring it out in a DVD or on the web. But it was a great one hour special back in 2002 -- me and a lot of nuns -- one of those gems lost to re-run never never land. Well, I don't think I will go into cutting music records, but if you would like more details about the products and tools that we used at St. Michaels, here it is.

BUILDING A FENCE After the strings and tape measurers help to layout the fence, you really should rent a power hole digger. One hefty person or three of us littler people can operate the monster you saw on TV. Larger models handle their own weight and are easier to operate, kind of like the sit down lawnmowers. In some cities, hole-digging services are available. Even with a power auger, you will need to use a scoop shovel to clean out the loose stuff that is sitting in the bottom of the hole. These too are best rented. A small battery operated circular saw is capable of cutting through fence stringers and fence boards. One of the big advantages of these small saws is that they are lightweight and quite safe to work with. Black & Decker donated a cordless FireStorm saw to sisters for this project. The best way to nail on fence boards is with a pneumatic nailer because it is not only fast and easy, but you don't do damage to the fence with the constant hitting of a hammer. The nails come glued together like a pack of staples. You will need to rent the compressor and the nailer. Ask the people at the rental store to actually do some nailing with you right in their shop to be sure you understand the whole set-up and the safety features of the nailer.

WOOD RESTORATION The first step in removing outdoor paint is to use a heat gun and spatula. This doesn't get all the paint off but does get most of it off without the cost of sandpaper or chemical strippers. If you must work on a windy day, shield the work from the wind. B&D provided heat guns for this job. Then take off the rest with a good two-handed paint scraper, like the ones that Richard's provided to the sisters. The wood rot was restored using an epoxy wood restorer system from BCS Wood Restoration Inc. A two part epoxy liquid was soaked into the wood first to kill the bacteria and solidify the wood, then a two part epoxy putty was used to fill in the crack and missing wood. For more details check out "Restoring Rotting Wood" .

PATCHING CEILING PLASTER When patching a ceiling you will want to use a lightweight compound. LePage supplied lots of Poly Instafil for this project. It is an exceptionally lightweight patching compound that will not sag or drip off of the ceiling, and it is easy to sand. Whenever working with plaster you should have a variety of sizes of spatulas, from about 3 inches to over 8 inches, such as the excellent spatulas that the Richard's company donated to the sisters. Working with two spatulas at a time, one larger than the other, allows for good control of the material, and smooth application on the wall or ceiling. For more details on repairing plaster, click "HERE" .

INSULATING THE ATTIC The sisters had a walkway in this massive attic that was made of boards laid over the plaster supports, but this caused serious cold spots on the ceiling below, resulting in condensation, peeling paint and falling plaster. We replaced the boards with sheets of rigid foam insulation and then topped up missing insulation in the rest of the attic with Fiberglas batts, cut to fit around all the obstructions. A thanks to Owens Corning for offering a lot of pink warmth to the sisters. For much more information on attic insulation projects, click "HERE" .

THE SAUNA We didn't have time in the TV show to talk much about the Soft Heat Sauna. The sisters

had seen this wonderful 'knock down furniture' dry sauna while at the home show in Calgary, and they really wanted one for all of their aches and pains. We got a really special deal from the manufacturer in Calgary, and I was surprised to see that the sisters had put it together without me. They tell me it is wonderful. In 2018 the Calgary operation is no longer manufacturing saunas -- and many kits on the market are receiving great criticism about poor wood and various off-gassing or other wood or heater problems. I have located a highly recommended "hospital grade" sauna kit made in Ontario with only local Canadian wood: the SunRay sauna.

CHANDELER CEILING CENTRES The beautiful ceiling centres that we put up in the chapel were all donated by Balmer studios in Toronto. Although they deal in real plaster moldings and decorations, these lightweight beauties were from the polyurethane line.

WEATHERSTRIPPING I hope that none of you have to weather-strip as many windows as the sisters had. A special thanks to Schlegel Canada Inc. for supplying miles of those vinyl 'V' strips. I hope you saw the wider vinyl door strip that I showed you as well. Although not a common name in the hardware stores, Schlegel makes some of the best weather-stripping available. For more information on weather-stripping, click "[HERE](#)".

TOOLS One of the tools that you kept seeing in different projects was the FireStorm Cordless Multi-Tool MT1203K-2. This 12-volt base has a fantastic quick-change front-end system that transforms into a drill, a jigsaw or a sander -- each of them a decent tool. Black & Decker's gift of a couple of these kits to the convent quickly enlarged their ability to do-it-themselves.

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