



MAKING A HOUSE A

*home*

Several years ago, my family experienced some hard times. I determined that the best way for us to handle our pain was to look outward. Rather than wallowing in self-pity, we would look around to see if we could help someone else who was facing their own challenge. To remind my family of this commitment, I tried something a bit crazy. One evening I handed each of my boys' paintbrushes and had them paint a statement about doing something good in the world on the walls of our living room! My hope was that each morning as we came down the stairs we would be encouraged by our own artwork to try to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Now, I knew that we would be renovating our house in a few months so this artwork wouldn't be there permanently, and the activity became one that was both therapeutic in the moment and inspiring over the long run. After the renovations, my nanny took artwork from each of my boys along with meaningful quotes and pictures, framed them and created a more permanent wall of inspiration. Looking at my wall today, I am continually reminded of how the art we choose to display really makes our houses, buildings of wood and brick, into homes for our families. They can become an expression of who we are or who we want to be.

Two local River Hill residents who have made it a career to help people create beautiful and meaningful "homes" are Ellen Duncan and Tracy Boule of Organizers on Call. As Ellen explains, "A house is a structure which not only protects people from the elements, but that tells a story, expresses a person's interests and make guests feel welcome. From simple ideas like decorating walls with art that means something to you to more involved DIY projects like customizing the small details on your furniture will turn a house of any size into a warm, welcoming home. From the earliest days, people have decorated their homes with all sorts of things like found objects in nature (shells, pine cones) and family weavings to photographs, sculptures and paintings. Art can be anything and everything you want it to be. Most of all, it adds an element to your home that makes it feel unique to you, what you find beautiful. If you're looking to make your rooms come to life, make a short list of the things that you love and want to see every day. Your list could include a collection of books you'd like to display in a creative way, a family portrait, a branch you found in your yard or a doorstep you grew up with that becomes a tabletop sculpture – or anything else that makes you smile when you look at it. Give these items a special spot in your home and they will take on a whole new meaning and give people an instant sense of what you find beautiful when they walk in the door."

