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INSIDE

Corporation warns against lead paint

By Duane Barbati, Press & Guide Newspapers

WARRENDALE — The Heritage Detroit Non-Profit Housing Corporation Feb. 18, hosted the Detroit Town Hall Meeting: Information & Resources fair on the hazards of lead-based paint.

The Town Hall meeting held at St. Christopher church in Warrendale featured free lead testing for children under 6 years old, lead poisoning prevention and information on how to prevent lead poisoning.

"Our main focus of the town hall meeting is to get kids tested," said Heritage Detroit Non-Profit Corporation Director Christine Tithof. "People need to get involved especially to get kids under 6 tested for lead poisoning."

According to a Wayne State University Environmental Health Sciences Center information booklet, one in 10 children in Detroit will be lead poisoned and one in six lead poisoned children suffer learning and behavior problems.

Children are lead poisoned with a 10 microgram per deciliter blood level of lead in their blood stream.

"We have lead in the paint of most Detroit homes," said Bill Ridella of the Detroit Health Department.

"We need to take the appropriate measures to see that the lead is not exposed, especially from peeling paint. Especially if you have young children, and young children are damaged the most from lead. Lead is a metal and impacts the brain, learning and behavior."

Lead can cause problems including hearing loss, poor appetite, tiredness and headaches under the 10mcg/dl lead blood levels.

Lead is found in lead-based paint of homes built before 1978.

But according to the EHSC-WSU booklet, Lead is found in old plumbing fixtures, imported food cans, bread wrappers, plastic grocery bags, ethnic spices, colored newspapers, old painted furniture and toys, some calcium supplements and dust on floors and around windows.

"New regulations came out a couple of years ago that when Housing and Urban Development money is used in rehabilitating a building or home, they have to make it lead safe," said Les Berman of Housing and Urban Development.

Berman said that in the past, municipal officials across the nation would say they didn't want invest the money toward making homes lead-safe.

"The cities would walk away," he said. "Now, we are forcing them; whenever they do rehab, they must make it lead-safe."

Berman said HUD gives money to 43 communities in Michigan, plus money to the state, that supports rehabilitation of homes.

"We're talking over \$100 million a year," he said. "That's all got to be used to make homes lead safe. And that's by regulation."

He said HUD provides money for lead testing, training of risk assessors to test for lead in homes and training of contractors on how to do lead abatement.

"HUD is trying to be more aggressive in responding to the lead problem out there," said Berman. "In 1995, we gave

Detroit a \$5.9 million grant for lead abatement. This year we gave the city \$2.1 million that they have not spent. The city is working on contracting it out."

Parents are encouraged to get a simple blood test that can prevent a lifetime spoiled by the irreversible damage caused by lead poisoning by calling the Detroit Health Department at 876-4000 or 876-4200.

According to the Centers for Disease Control website, an estimated 890,000 U.S. children aged 1-5 years old have elevated blood lead levels, and more than one-fifth of African-American children living in housing built before 1978 have elevated blood lead levels.

"We need to remove lead from our environment as best as possible," said Ridella. "We do that as homeowners and renters. "We want to have clean and healthy homes. You have to have a clean indoors. We spend so much time indoors, and for kids that spend a majority of time indoors, we want to make sure they have a safe living environment."