

DAILY NEWS

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Who can teach do-it-yourself home improvement and repair skills? Walter Mullins, the handyman, can.

For 22 years, Mullins has taught free home maintenance classes to thousands of students in Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island

Shawana Barnett and her mother, Claudia, were about to buy their first home.

Kim and Dee Rashad wanted be able to have a knowledgeable conversation with anyone they might hire to do work around their place.

Dream tenant that she is, Natahia Beltran was hoping to save her landlord some money by replacing some broken bathroom tiles herself.

That's why they and 14 other people joined Walter Mullins in cutting ceramic tiles and slapping adhesive on what looked like movie set walls in St. Gertrude's Gymnasium in Far Rockaway, Queens as students in an eight-week-long Home Maintenance Workshop.

Sponsored by The Housing Partnership Development Corp., the Margert Community Corp. and Joseph and Laurel Marcino, the free course gives homeowners and prospective homeowners crash courses in all things home repair: drywall installation and repair, plumbing, electrical work, painting, even moulding installation.

Mullins, a retired banker, estimates thousands of home repairman wannabes have taken the course over the close to 22 years he has offered it.

“What this course really teaches is confidence,” Mullins said. “You learn how to tile, you learn how to sheetrock, but it’s



Anthony Lanzilote for New York Daily News

Walter Mullins teaches mother and daughter team Shawana, center, and Claudia Barnett how to do simple home repairs in a class in St. Gertrude's Gym in Far Rockaway.

really confidence, because now, even if you don't do the work yourself, you know enough to have a conversation with the person who does do the work.”

More women take the course than men, he said, a statistic proven by the two men among his current pupils.

They work on a set — three, three-walled rooms and a like number of ten-foot-high, five-foot-across towers that each class builds in the first week.

Students climb up and down ladders, learn the names and some history of the tools they use — “spirit” levels got the name because the balance bubble inside of them used to float in alcohol - and, like professionals, have to clean their tools and worksites when they're done.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Hempstead, L.I., Mullins, a former senior vice president with Roslyn Bank, is as much cheerleader as teacher, dashing around the room to oversee and praise his students' work and constantly reminding them what brought them there.

“You just put up seven tiles in ten minutes,” he told a beaming woman. “A professional would have charged you five dollars a tile. Look at the money you just saved.”

He's taught the course in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, Astoria, Queens, and in Freeport and Centereach, L.I. The program has also been duplicated in Chicago.

Mullins, 64, was also kind enough to overlook the fact that I got his age wrong when I profiled him and the program just over ten years ago.