

Glass helps do-it-yourself divas tackle home improvement projects

By CARA NISSMAN

The lady in red knew what she wanted and eagerly stepped up to the front of the crowd to lay her hands on the damp object of her affection — a wet saw.

"I love it," said Sandra Mahoney, 39, of Lynn after tearing into a tile in a Home Depot aisle in Danvers.

With her red dress, heels and perfectly polished red fingernails, Mahoney didn't fit the mold of the conventional, tool-belt-toting home-im-

provement junkie. But Mahoney, a registered nurse, snapped that stereotype as quickly as she split the tile as one of a dozen women who attended

the store's Do-it-Yourself Workshop Monday, one of about 1,500 workshops nationwide.

"We want women to feel comfortable doing projects," said Leanne Panacopulos, the store's human resources associate. "They have the capability, they just don't have the know-how or the confidence."

Many of the Danvers participants said they're in various phases of home renovations. Mahoney has planned to tile her bathroom for three years.

"I hire guys to do it, and they never show up," she said. "I finally said, 'You know something? I'm going to do it myself. I don't have a clue how I'm going to do it, but I know once I

start I won't be able to stop.'"

Angela Pirrotta brought her mother along to glean remodeling ideas. When Pirrotta, 29, of Haverhill got a chance to take a crack at the saw, she said, "I feel like (I'm in) a Miss America pageant," as she gleefully donned an orange apron, safety glasses and ear protection.

Some women sought to ease their self-consciousness.

Although Kristen Noren said she doesn't plan to remodel her kitchen by herself, she said the class gave her some background so she can ask the right questions when she's ready to buy supplies.

"Sometimes it's intimidating just to

walk into a place and say, 'I want tile. I want grout,'" said Noren, 28, of Wakefield. "It's hard to rely on other people. This let's me get started."

The class also demystified power tools for some participants. The buzz of the saw both frightened and tempted Charlise Whiteside.

Laying tile is "like frosting a cake," said Whiteside, 49, of Beverly, but "the saw's what I'm afraid of."

She didn't stay scared long, though. Her verdict? "It's just like using a sewing machine."

Other ladies are letting their guard down. Nearly three-quarters of American women ages 25-49 said they are more confident in their ability to do

home-improvement projects today than five years ago, according to a Roper ASW poll for Home Depot.

The classes also might take the fear out of hiring others, said Panacopulos. The more women know, the less chance they'll get swindled.

"I don't know if (contractors) specifically take advantage of women," said Panacopulos, "but they do take advantage of people who don't know what they're doing."

Yet Mahoney said women shouldn't be afraid to ask questions when planning projects.

"Just take a deep breath and ask," she said. "Once you start asking, all your anxiety will go away."



GETTING THE JOB DONE: Sandra Mahoney tries her hand at cutting tile during a workshop at the Danvers Home Depot. The company has been offering workshops geared toward women do-it-yourselfers.

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