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Opening Doors, New and Old

Mother-Daughter Duo Talk Revitalizing Neighborhoods, 'Good Bones' TV Show

When Indianapolis native Mina Starsiak Hawk graduated from Indiana University in 2007, she was ready to begin her career and build a space she could call home. With the support of her mom, Karen E Laine, she was able to buy a house close to downtown Indianapolis. However, she knew she'd have to roll up her sleeves and get to work, because the home dated back to the early 1900s and needed major repairs and upgrades.

While rehabbing homes was a new endeavor for Starsiak Hawk, Laine had fond childhood memories of helping her parents complete DIY projects around their house. This early exposure to demolishing the old and building the new made Laine eager to help her daughter with her home rehab project. After helping her daughter by her house, she spent the weekends with Starsiak Hawk working on the home.

"Around the same time that Mina bought her first house, I had bought a home in the Fountain Square neighborhood of Indianapolis to use as an office for my law firm," Laine says. "We renovated Mina's home and my office.

After working on those homes, we started buying more old buildings that had become eyesores in the neighborhood, and we took to rehabbing them. By the fourth home we bought and rehabbed, Mina suggested we give our work a name, and our company Two Chicks and a Hammer was born."

As their business was starting to take flight, Laine was practicing as a lawyer full time and Starsiak Hawk was waitressing full time. Their weekends were busy working on one of their many projects. When Starsiak Hawk was contacted by a production company that saw their side business as something worth showcasing, she had no idea how much their business would grow.

"We had a lot of great ideas, but with our full-time jobs, we really didn't have a lot of time to do any more than about two house renovations a year," Starsiak Hawk says. "We were always coming up with great ideas on how we could grow our company, but we weren't able to see anything to completion. So when I was contacted by a production company interested in us and our story, it just felt like it was meant to happen."





Mina Starsiak Hawk (left) and her mom **Karen E Laine** began rehabbing homes when they bought houses southeast of downtown Indianapolis in the Fountain Square neighborhood. In 2015, their passion to revitalize the neighborhood became their own TV show.

“The production company discovered us by mistake. They stumbled upon our Two Chicks and a Hammer Facebook page and saw something they liked.”

—Karen E Laine, “Good Bones”

That call led to “Good Bones,” which is now in its third season on the popular network, Home and Garden Television (HGTV). The first season of the show began filming in July 2015. What began as a side business and hobby turned in to a life-changing pursuit when HGTV picked up the show. Through Two Chicks and a Hammer, they now renovate about 13 houses a year in addition to starring on “Good Bones.”

To learn more about how their passion led to a successful home renovation company and hit television show, attend Laine and Starsiak Hawk’s keynote presentation, “Small Business Management: Turning a Hobby Into Something More,” at the North American Retail Hardware Association’s (NRHA) All-Industry Conference, on Tuesday, May 8 at 11:30 a.m. Following the presentation they’ll be available for a meet and greet with show attendees. Learn more at nrhaconference.com.

Random Discovery to Reality TV Stars

It’s not every day you have someone call and tell you they think you should be on TV. So when the Denver-based production company High Noon Entertainment initially reached out to Starsiak Hawk with a pitch for a show about her mother-daughter rehabbing business, she wasn’t sure it was legitimate.

“The production company discovered us by mistake,” Laine says. “They stumbled upon our Two Chicks and a Hammer Facebook page and saw something they liked. We had a Skype interview with them, and they sent us a video camera to film ourselves and return it. From that, they made what is called a sizzle to pitch the concept of the story. They brought the sizzle to HGTV, and the rest, as they say, is history.”

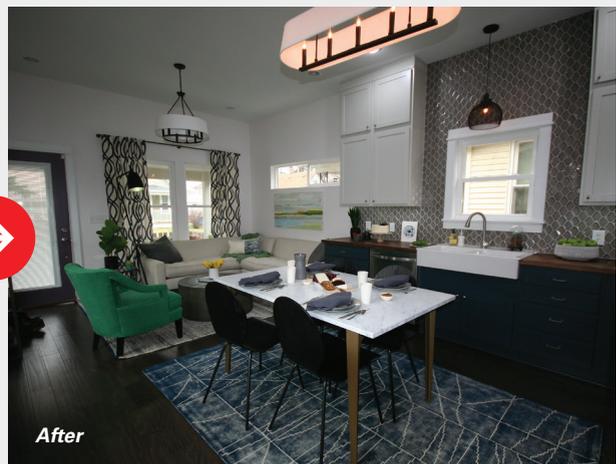
After HGTV picked up the show, their side company Two Chicks and a Hammer became a full-time endeavor immediately. In their first season of “Good Bones,” they went from rehabbing an average of two homes a year to 10 the first year. By seasons two and three of the show, they were rehabbing 13 homes a year. Because of this jump in production, they needed the funds to purchase homes and invest in the rehabbing process, but they also quit their full-time jobs because the show demanded their full attention.

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A Makeover Experience to Get Excited About

Since Laine and Starsiak Hawk began their rehabbing business in 2007, they have been revitalizing Indianapolis neighborhoods that were desperate for attention, repair and new families. Through their TV show "Good Bones," the pair is able to impress viewers with how the homes look before and after they take on houses as projects.

Here are some before-and-after examples from a few of the episodes of "Good Bones." The mother-daughter team enjoy taking the worst homes on the block and making them the best. Through the show, they also try to offer practical advice and tips viewers can use for their own home improvement projects.



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“Before we got started, we were a bit naive about what was going to happen,” Starsiak Hawk says. “We thought someone would just follow us around with cameras, but we quickly learned that’s not how it works. Filming the show is a full-time job. But managing *Two Chicks and a Hammer* with 13 different homes going through the rehabbing process is, too. We quickly realized we needed to gather a strong team around us.”

While Laine and Starsiak Hawk are the stars of the show, they also have other family members involved. Viewers get a chance to see a Midwestern family’s take on their shared goal of revitalizing Indianapolis one home at a time.

“With our company, I very much am the business end. I have my real estate license and I think about the numbers more, while Mom is the soul of the business with her endless creativity and ideas.”

—Mina Starsiak Hawk, *“Good Bones”*

“If you take the worst house on the block and make it the best house on the block, you’ve changed that entire street,” Laine says. “The neighbors are happy about the changes, and their pride in their home and neighborhood increases as well.”

As far as running the business together, Starsiak Hawk says they each have found their own place in the operation.

“I think my mom and I are very similar, but there are areas where I’m her complete opposite,” Starsiak Hawk says. “With our company, I very much am the business end. I have my real estate license and I think about the numbers more, while Mom is the soul of the business with her endless creativity and ideas. I often have to be the one who says ‘no’ to things to balance out her ideas. I just try to inject realism, so sometimes I come across as the bad guy.”

A Transformation: DIYers Turned Pros

When Laine and Starsiak Hawk first began rehabbing homes together, neither of them had professional training. What they did have was a creative vision and the patience to teach themselves how to do different projects.

“After I bought my first house and began the process of remodeling, I went out and bought *‘Home Remodeling for Dummies,’*” Starsiak Hawk says. “If I didn’t find what I needed in there, I would search online and watch YouTube videos.”



When it comes to home improvement projects, **Starsiak Hawk** and **Laine** say they learn what they need to complete remodels by reading books, watching videos online and consulting with experts, like the staff at **Fusek’s True Value Hardware** in downtown Indianapolis.



In season two, episode three of “Good Bones,” Laine and Starsiak Hawk purchased this four-bedroom, four-bath, 4,300-square-foot house, which included a third-floor attic with useable space for a large bonus room. On the left is how the property looked before its transformation.

On top of reading and watching videos, they learned through trial and error, gaining hands-on experience by tackling home improvement projects.

“Before we installed bamboo floors in my house, I had a lot to learn,” Starsiak Hawk says. “Together we took on the project, and while we made mistakes, we did it ourselves and learned a lot in the process.”

Another project they decided to tackle was installing cabinets in a kitchen. Since neither of them had done a project like that before, they researched before and during the project, making a point to double check their work every step of the way.

“When we installed kitchen cabinets, we knew they needed to be level, plumb and square,” Laine says. “A kitchen installer would usually only take a day to install kitchen cabinets. We wanted to take our time, and kept a close eye on our measurements. Later on, the cabinet installers came with their laser measure and asked us who installed our cabinets. When we told them we did, they let us know it was the best cabinet install job they’d ever seen. That was such a great feeling.”

In addition to being self-taught rehabbers, the duo says they turn to their local independent hardware store, Fusek’s True Value Hardware.

“We try to shop and support independent businesses wherever and whenever we can,” Starsiak Hawk says. “For many things we need, we’ll go to Fusek’s. I know when I call them I’ll get someone who knows me. When I call a big-box store, I’m often bounced around from person to person.”

The relationship with the team at their local hardware store gives them access to educated people who can help them work through a problem or remodeling question.

“I let them know what I need and they’ll find it for me. If I can get there by 4 to 6 p.m., I’ll get the happy hour 10 percent discount that customers get on weekdays,” Laine says. “If they don’t have it but they can order it, they will, which is great. Plus, they’re full of really good advice. If I’m working on a project, I never hesitate to tell them what I’m working on.”

To stay on top of all the projects they have going on, from their hit TV show to the homes they’re rehabbing, having a hardware source to help is huge.

“Being in a family business also means taking issues from a normal family dynamic and putting it in a pressure cooker. Instead of going our separate ways, we stay professional and fix issues much faster.”

—Karen E Laine, “Good Bones”

“The biggest thing for me when working with a retailer is the responsiveness they can give me,” Starsiak Hawk says. “Independent businesses can usually get materials in our hands quickly.”

Laine also values retailers who understand time is precious.

“You want to talk to someone who knows their stuff,” Laine says. “Someone who knows what I need and can answer my questions can save me time, effort and trouble—that’s huge!”

Laine and Starsiak Hawk both realize the impact that shows like “Good Bones” and online resources like Pinterest have in establishing trends and helping homeowners find their style and design preferences.

“We try not to focus on trends,” Starsiak Hawk says. “Since I work in real estate, I don’t like following trends; I’d rather incorporate a more timeless look into the homes we rehab. However, I know our viewers say they get ideas and inspiration from the projects we’ve done on our show. What’s so cool is that if they see something on TV or online, they can go to a retailer and show them exactly what they’re trying to replicate. This ensures they have a better chance of getting the desired look than if they had no visuals to present.”

Family Business Builds Strong Relationships

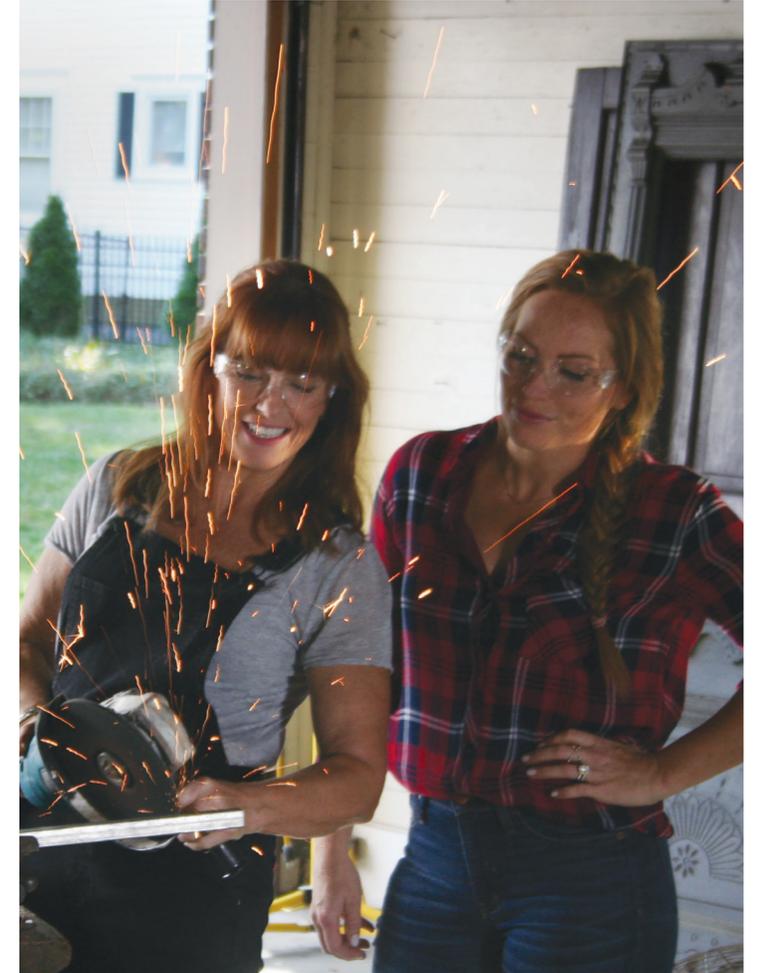
The third season of “Good Bones” premiered in April, and Laine says they are still happy when they hear from fans who say they enjoy watching their mother-daughter dynamic play out each week.

“We have a lot of parents and kids who watch the show together and enjoy learning about another family and seeing projects that they feel they could do,” Laine says. “It’s cool to hear people say they watch our show to relax and forget about work and stress.”

Laine and Starsiak Hawk have worked together for more than a decade, but seeing their family dynamic play out on TV has brought them closer, the pair says.

“There is a certain level of trust you have when you work with your family,” Laine says. “We know we’ll figure out issues and when we have success, we get to enjoy it together. Yet being in a family business also means taking issues from a normal family dynamic and putting it in a pressure cooker. Instead of going our separate ways, we stay professional and fix issues much faster.”

Although Starsiak Hawk and Laine couldn’t share any future plans or news about “Good Bones,” they did say their intention was to continue growing Two Chicks and a Hammer. Their office building is located in a home they rehabbed themselves, and nearby is a warehouse that Laine says they want to transform into a retail space with a liquor license.



Both Laine and Starsiak Hawk say working in a family business that’s on TV has helped them solve any personal issues they have much quicker.

“We’re creating good homes and providing a good investment for our buyers.”

—Mina Starsiak Hawk, “Good Bones”

Though their journey is now broadcast on TV, Laine says their true satisfaction comes from seeing the neighborhoods they work in receive much-needed updates.

“We couldn’t do what we’re doing if there weren’t people who cared,” Laine says. “For someone who has been living in the neighborhood, it’s not their fault if there is a vacant home on the block. We like to think that we step in and can do something to fix the vacant home and add a new family to the neighborhood.”

Laine says she hopes the TV show and the nationwide interest in home renovations can clean up neighborhoods and even slow crime. However, they don’t want to change or push out the people and the character that make a neighborhood unique.

“The neighborhoods we work in are where we live and work ourselves,” Laine says. “We like our neighborhood, and we’re not trying to change it.

What we want to do is get rid of the vacant homes and remove the crime. If we can do that, we can elevate our neighborhood as a whole.”

When they first started transforming homes in the Fountain Square and Bates-Hendricks neighborhoods of Indianapolis, which are just southeast of downtown, they knew there would be challenges. These neighborhoods had a reputation for crime and most of the homes needed repairs. They had to ask for a lot of trust in buyers, too, Starsiak Hawk says.

“I have to explain to potential buyers it may not seem like it makes sense to make a purchase in a neighborhood they aren’t sure about, but the vision is that it will increase in value and is worth it,” Starsiak Hawk says. “We’re creating good homes and providing a good investment for our buyers.”

Although transitioning from working as a lawyer to owning and operating a family business had its challenges, Laine says the passion she had for the people she helped in both careers remains.

“When I was a prosecutor, I met people on their worst days,” Laine says. “I was there to help my clients through the process of finding themselves again. And that’s what we do with these homes. We find a home on its worst day and make it look good again, bringing a new family to the home.”



Taking on homes that are in serious need of work is not something a lot of people would want to invest in. However, **Starsiak Hawk** says they ask their potential buyers to trust the vision and be part of the change to see the neighborhood continue to improve.