

Immediate Release

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Contractor referral service celebrates five years, expands resources for homeowners

Washington, DC, October 18 – Setting out to renovate her Dupont Circle condo five years ago, Marla Selko didn't know where to begin. "I was single. It was my first home. I couldn't even hang a shelf," said Selko. "I didn't know how to go about finding a contractor, or who to trust to let into my home." That experience, along with conversations with many other DC-area residents who faced similar challenges, inspired former sales executive Selko to launch Urban Referrals, a boutique-level service connecting DC-area homeowners and others (investors, commercial and rental property owners) with reliable, licensed contractors to meet their home improvement needs.

Today Urban Referrals is a network of more than 85 contractors and close to 5,000 homeowners, almost half of whom have used its services more than twice. To celebrate its sixth year, it is launching *Marketplace*, a service that provides additional homeowner resources for their home before, during or after their remodeling projects. It also gives local companies that provide services and products for the home an opportunity to advertise at an affordable price in a space with a captured audience of individuals seeking home improvement services.

Urban Referrals caters to busy homeowners in the Washington D.C. area by combining the convenience of the Internet with the personal touch of a boutique-level service. The company takes the guesswork out of choosing a contractor by strictly screening all contractors who wish to join its network – checking their status with Consumer Affairs verifying their licensing, proof of insurance and workers compensation; and calling current customers and trade references.

The company provides homeowners with a short list of potential contractors who meet their needs, then provide support to clients to help them make a final selection. Urban Referrals staff work with clients by educating them about the home improvement process, including how to create a scope of work, how to compare bids, questions to ask contractors, project planning, product information, and the best time of year to complete different types of projects.

The Urban Referrals business model extends beyond its relationships with contractors and clients. "Supporting the community is part of who we are as a business," said Selko. To that end, Selko joined a group of area women business leaders in the home improvement field to build *Ms. Manor* (www.msmanordc.org), a DC Habitat for Humanity home. So far the group has raised about \$26,000 through an online donation web site and fundraisers. In December, Urban Referrals will donate \$2.00 to *Ms. Manor* for every job booked with a referred company. The new Marketplace service is part of this philosophy, helping to promote local businesses. In the future, Selko hopes to add a "green component," to help area homeowners make their property more environmentally friendly.

In an industry that is often transient, Urban Referrals has lasting relationships with many of its contractors. Several have worked with the company for the past three or four years. Looking forward, Selko has plans to grow both her contractor network and her client base in parts of Maryland and Northern Virginia and other metro areas.

To learn more about Urban Referrals, including "case studies" of homeowners who have used the service to avoid home improvement nightmares, call 877-332-0848.

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