Building a Legacy of Home and Community: The Mercer Family's Story

John and Betty Mercer have owned their Utica home since 1989. It's more than just a house—it's where they raised their children, built a life together, and now enjoy visits from their **19 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren**. For over three decades, their home has been the heart of their family.

When they first bought their house, some people questioned their decision. *"Why buy in that neighborhood—so close to traffic, fires, and crime?"* But for the Mercers, **homeownership meant something deeper**. It was about planting roots, taking responsibility, and proving that a strong, vibrant community starts with people who believe in it.

"Having your own house is great, but it takes a lot of responsibility," John says. *"People need to step it up if they want to own their own home and improve the community."*

John and Betty have always led by example. They've worked hard to maintain their home and inspire others along the way. So, when they learned about the **Lead-Safe Utica program** through

the **HomeOwnershipCenter (HOC)**, they saw an opportunity to continue investing in their family's future—this time with safety and long-term maintenance in mind.

"Maintaining a house is a job!" John says with a smile. Their goal was to make the home **safer/healthier for their grandchildren** and more secure for their own retirement years. The process wasn't immediate—*"The application process took a while, and we had to have some patience,"* Betty recalls. *"There were many steps, but in the end, it was worth it!"*

Through the program, the Mercers received essential repairs, including a **new roof, new porches, and the remediation of lead-painted surfaces** throughout the home. Working hand-in-hand with the HOC team and their contractor, they were able to find the best solutions tailored to their family's needs.

Now, with the renovations complete, John and Betty say their home is safer, healthier, and more secure. The major maintenance issues are resolved, giving them peace of mind as they look forward to the future.

"This has been such a blessing for us," Betty says. *"We feel more secure in our home and deeply grateful for the support from the HomeOwnershipCenter team."*

Their advice to others? *"We encourage people to apply and see if they qualify. It's absolutely worth it!"*

Lead-Safe Utica addresses lead hazards in privately-owned housing using funds awarded to the City of Utica by HUD. This program aims to prevent childhood lead poisoning by creating lead-safe housing and helps homeowners, landlords, and tenants control hazards from lead in paint, soil, and dust.

There is funding available to help identify and address lead and safety hazards that may be in your home and harming your family. Find out more about the Lead-Safe Utica program and how you may qualify: http://unhs.org/lead-safe-utica.

The HomeOwnershipCenter – chartered in 1979 by NeighborWorks America; promotes housing and community development through programs such as Homebuyer Education and Financial Coaching, housing rehabilitation, and foreclosure prevention and intervention. Take the first step toward your housing goals today—contact the HOC team to learn how we can help! Visit unhs.org or call 315-724-4197.

Osenbach Family's Story ***Don't Touch That Door!***

https://unhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Osenbach-Family-LEAD-story.pdf

Khaing Family's Story ***A Safer Home, A Brighter Future***

https://unhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Khaing-Family-LEAD-story.pdf