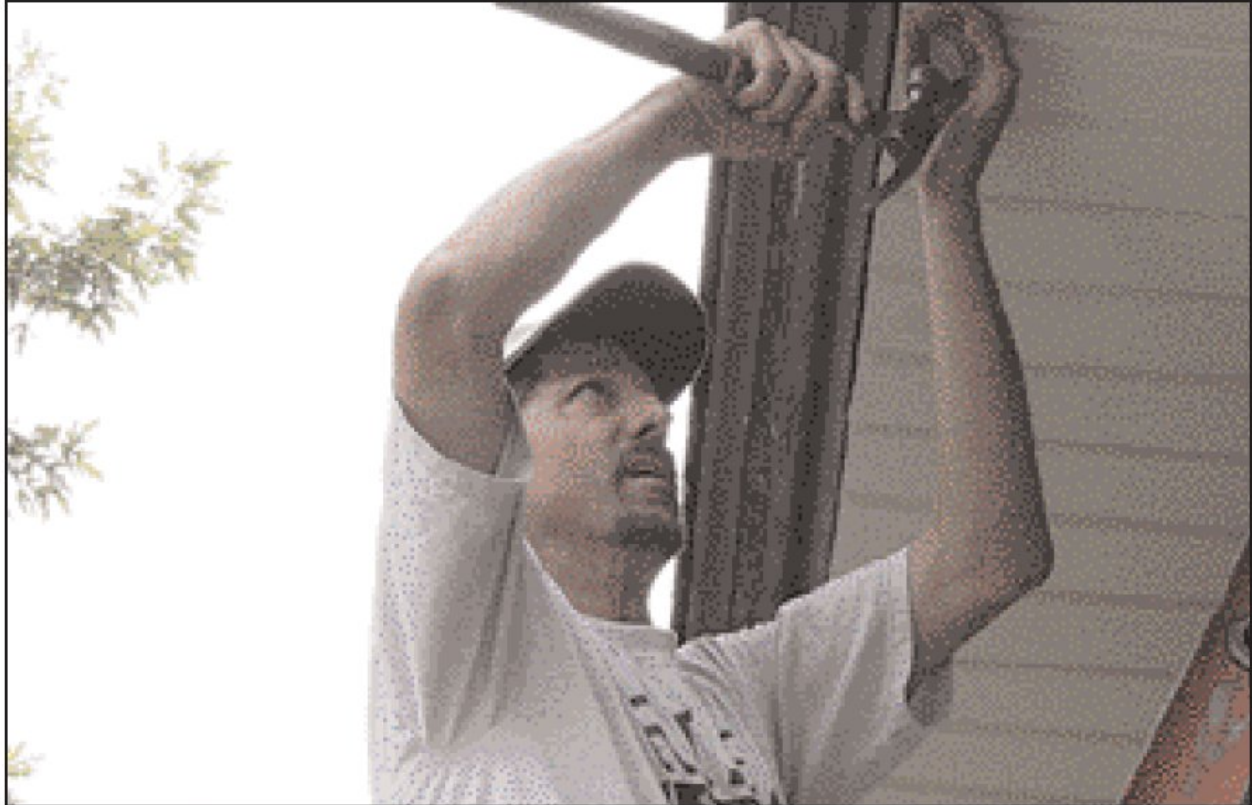


HILLSDALE

# LEAD REMOVAL GIVES FAMILY HOPE



Contractor John Soisson replaces some panels coated in lead paint at the house at 60 S. Howell St. Soisson and his team closed the house on Monday to eliminate numerous health hazards caused by lead paint.

DAILY NEWS / NICK TABOR

## Fresh start could help autistic child

By **NICK TABOR**  
DAILY NEWS CORRESPONDENT

Owen Campbell, a 3-year-old autistic child from Hillsdale, can hardly sleep in the Hillsdale Motel room his family moved into on Monday.

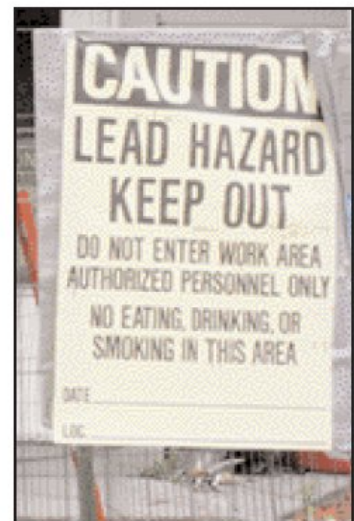
He would prefer his own bed in the family's duplex at 60 S. Howell St. But the family is waiting until the end of the week, when contractors will finish removing lead paint hazards from their home, potentially alleviating some of Owen's long-term health problems.

Owen's mother, Tammy Campbell, said she doesn't like seeing her house fenced off and posted with "lead hazard" signs, but she knows this week's inconveniences will start paying off in just a few days.

"It's not embarrassing because it could potentially give our son a better chance at learning," she said. "It really isn't putting us completely out, ya know?"

Tammy Campbell said both her sons — Owen and 7-year-old Eli — have autism. Owen was also diag-

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# REMOVE

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nosed with lead poisoning in November after receiving a blood test.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency sent a lead inspector to the Campbells' home to see if it contained lead hazards. It did, so the agency encouraged the Campbells to apply for a state grant to eliminate those hazards.

The state offered to spend \$4,000 — enough to cover all the renovations — and hire a contractor to fix the problems, said Steve Smith, field consultant for the Lead and Healthy Homes Section of the Michigan Health Department.

The state always gives similar grants to families who have children younger than 7 years old who suffer from serious cases of lead poisoning, Smith said.

The state awarded the bid to Get the Lead Out, a contracting company based in Gobles that specializes in lead hazard removal.

The contractors started work on Monday. They hope to finish replacing 23 windows and four or five doors, all of which are coated with lead paint, and to cover several walls with protective paint by Friday evening, said John Soisson, the company's field supervisor.

"They're fast, busy workers," Campbell said. "But they do so much of it that it's probably old hat to them."

## For more information

To learn more about lead poisoning and state grants, visit [www.michigan.gov/leadsafe](http://www.michigan.gov/leadsafe) or consult a doctor about blood testing.

She said the house still contained the original windows from its construction in the 1800s.

She said she and her husband Patrick hope removing the lead hazards will alleviate Owen's behavioral and learning problems — particularly trying to eat non-food items.

James Phillips, medical director for the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, said lead poisoning often leads to behavioral and learning problems, though eating non-food items is more likely a symptom of autism.

No respectable studies have demonstrated direct links between autism and lead poisoning, but the "results are still out," he said.

Whether or not removing the lead hazards affects behavior, though, Tammy Campbell said they still appreciate the chance to stop Owen's lead poisoning from getting worse.

"We're really grateful that there are programs out there to help us remove the lead," she said.