

## Setting up an expert network



Seth Harrison / The Journal News  
Neil Gordon of Chestnut Ridge, president of the Rockland Home Improvement Alliance.

Mary Shustack  
The Journal News

Camille Kartsonas of Orangeburg needed a painter.

Of course, she turned to the man who does her window treatments for advice.

What might seem an unlikely progression is instead a working example of the Rockland Home Improvement Alliance, a network of service professionals that marks its first anniversary next month.

Kartsonas had previously worked with Neil Gordon of Decorating with Fabric in Monsey. When turning to him for another job, she also asked for the referral.

"He knows I'm very meticulous, and he gave me a name," Kartsonas says.

But Gordon's pointing his client to Spilotras Painting of Chestnut Ridge was not a casual thing.

Both Gordon and Michael Spilotras are members of the alliance that Gordon, the president, founded with Howard Hellman of All Bright Electric in West Nyack, and Jim Burrill of the Culligan water-treatment company in New City.

The group is designed to inspire confidence in homeowners, both veterans and newcomers. Alliance members, limited to one per business type, provide roofing and gutters, window treatments and reupholstery, electrical work, closets, security, general painting, decorative painting, heating and air conditioning, water-system treatments, stonework, handcrafted furniture, carpeting and flooring

Please see ALLIANCE, 3D

# Life & Style

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Members of the Rockland Home Improvement Alliance include, front row, from left: Eric Buchalter of Design Air of Hillburn; Eric Laxman of Eric David Laxman, Inc. in Garnerville; Jeff Lieberman of Tri-State Carpet Connections in Tappan; middle row, from left: Andrew Gallina of A&J Reliable, Inc. in Spring Valley; Jim Burrill, of Culligan New City; back row from left: Neil Gordon, Decorating with Fabric in Monsey; Hallie Coletta, of Coletta Decorative Painting in Garnerville; Michael Jamieson of Jamieson Stoneworks in Sloatsburg; and Gary Wollman of Bullet Security in Nanuet.

## Need a painter? Call a plumber

ALLIANCE, from 1D

and landscaping.

After doing business in Rockland County for 14 years, Gordon had an informal network of contacts.

"I always thought it would be nice to develop a more systematic way of getting referrals," Gordon says.

And to have those referrals mean more, something Gordon says the alliance has helped develop.

"We have certain expectations of each other," Gordon says. "Each of us has 14 or 15 advocates of our own business out there ... Everybody here knows the importance of fulfilling your promises to your clients."

Members meet monthly to learn more about each others' businesses. They also attend home and trade shows, offer a speaker's bureau and readily hand out business cards of fellow alliance members.

But to become a member isn't as easy as paying the \$1,000 annual dues. To be considered, a Rock-

land-based business must have operated for more than five years and owners must provide personal and professional references along with proof of all necessary licensing.

Except for the artisans, the members must also operate a managed business. The alliance doesn't include the "one-man-show," where a painter might book and do jobs himself, always busy but hard to secure.

Instead, Gordon says, he wants to send you to "a painter with eight trucks on the road and can get to you next week."

"I feel once you have a managed business, you've reached the next level," Gordon adds. "Those people who are managed businesses are working on their business, not in their business."

The group continues to evolve and hopes to expand. New mem-

bers might include an architect, a general contractor and a pool company, but there's not a quota system.

"We are looking more at the quality of the business than 'we have this not that,'" Burrill, of Culligan, says.

That kind of thinking reflects the sense of community among the members.

Kartsonas says learning of the alliance added a built-in confidence, reinforced by her referral to Spilotras.

"He was very reliable," she says, giving her a welcome change from some past experiences over her 18 years in Rockland. "It was hit-or-miss or word-of-mouth, and you end up not being happy sometimes."

Kartsonas says the alliance also eases some security concerns.

"Going through the alliance you get to know the people and their workers," she says.

And good work can only lead to further referrals.

### For more information...

To reach the Rockland Home Improvement Alliance or any of its members, visit [www.rockbiz.org](http://www.rockbiz.org).

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