

In its place

Williston mom makes back to school easier with organized mudroom

By Michelle Edelbaum
Free Press Staff Writer

— WILLISTON
Dana Freeman lives by the adage "a place for everything and everything in its place." So it's fitting that Freeman's ultra-organized mudroom won best storage solution in the 2006 Better Homes and Gardens Top Home Improvements contest.

"I wanted this room to look nice because it's the first thing people see when they walk in the door," said Freeman, 39, of Williston. She worked with Peregrine Contracting to design the mudroom, outfitted with custom cabinets, radiant slate floors and vibrant green walls.

Even though each family member has a personal storage area, it's no easy task to keep a mudroom tidy with two young children, an active husband and a busy life. Here are Freeman's top five tips for creating a neat and attractive entryway:

■ **Think about your needs before you plan your space.**

The devil really is in the details when it comes to designing a space that accommodates all the aspects of your lifestyle. When Freeman was planning the shoe storage area, she measured her highest pair of boots to make sure the cabinet was tall enough and

measured her husband's shoes so the cabinets would be deep enough to accommodate two pairs. When she planned hanging space for jackets, she measured the family's longest coats to guide dimensions.

Freeman also thought about physical use of the space. Shelves and bins near the door are positioned in a natural spot for keys, purses and mail. A section of the cubbies houses a power outlet to charge phones and other electronic devices.

Overhead cabinets provide useful storage space, but are too high to reach without a stepstool, especially for Flynn, 8, and Callahan, 5. Freeman designed a deep bench and drawers with step platforms to offer a boost. In the laundry closet, openings in the shelves above the washing machine allow detergent and other liquids to flow directly into the machine.

■ **Consider the way you live and address problem areas.**

Entryway floors often become a dropping spot for sports bags, muddy shoes and wet snowy clothes. Freeman created

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Family members have their own drawers and cubbies to store personal effects and trinkets.



Photos by DARIA BISHOP, for the Free Press
Callahan Freeman, 5, looks through her bag while sitting on the custom cabinetry in her family's award-winning mudroom in their Williston home. Callahan's mom, Dana Freeman, helped with the design and the cabinetry was built by Peregrine Contracting Inc. in the spring of 2006.



Bins and shelving by the back door is perfect for outgoing mail, keys and miscellaneous items, like Tupperware, that need to be returned to friends.



Kitchen: Redesign on a budget

Looking to redecorate your kitchen on a budget? Need some ideas or advice? Visit the "Interior Design and Fashion" blog at www.burlingtonfree-press.com to see two local kitchens that received a makeover.

On the home page, click on the "Blogs" link; from there, click on "Interior Design and Fashion" under "Reader Blogs."

The Freeman children have their own section of cabinetry for jackets, hats, backpacks and lunchboxes, and trinkets in the mudroom.

School system: How to keep your home and kids ready for class

It's hard enough to control your own belongings. Now add backpacks, lunchboxes, library books, gym clothes, homework and permission slips — all of which present back-to-school organizing challenges. Beat the clutter, and get organized with these three stations:

Drop Station

■ **You need:** A modular cubby design.
■ **How it works:** Every child is assigned his or her own cubby, or multiple cubbies, in an easily accessible location near your home's entrance. Store backpacks, shoes and sporting equipment.
■ **Buy it:** The Expedi Bookcase, \$79.99 at Ikea, can be used vertically or horizontally. Target and Wal-Mart also sell cubby units; stackable units are versatile. If your area is small, use hooks and a shoe rack for backpacks and shoes.

Incoming-Paperwork Station

Create an area for important papers such as notes from a teacher, trip slips and report cards.
■ **You need:** A tray, box or hanging file folder.
■ **How it works:** When children empty backpacks, they place papers in the box. Parents read, sign and return papers to the backpack.
■ **Buy it:** The Eldon Optimizer, \$31.99 at Office Max, which provides four letter-size trays and slots for important papers. Pick attractive items in eye-catching colors.

Important-Records Station

Keep important papers such as a school calendar, teacher contact information and district policies in a designated space.
■ **You need:** A three-ring binder or a file folder that stands upright, preferably without a flap.
■ **How it works:** Place papers in a three-ring binder or file folder and store near a phone. The binder can be referenced with tabs, although everything must be hole-punched.
■ **Buy it:** Mom's Notebook, \$20, available at (623) 202-9199 or Susan@perfectlyplaced.org. Or check out Life.doc, \$29.95 at seejanetwork.com. The Expanding Desktop File, \$19.95 at youmo.com, has 10 pockets and a task bar that holds photos, business cards and papers. Consider a separate binder or box for keepsakes, artwork and schoolwork.
— Gannett News Service



DARIA BISHOP, for the Free Press

Dana Freeman demonstrates how the bottom shelf serves as a step to reach the high shelves above the washer and dryer in her award-winning mudroom. Freeman helped with the design, and the cabinetry was built by Peregrine Contracting Inc. in the spring of 2006.

ORGANIZE: Make school-home transition go smoothly

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a storage spot for her arch nemesis: her husband Andrew's hockey bag. His bulky gear found a home on a generous shelf in the laundry closet. A tall cubby provides a spot for sports gear, such as snowboards, skis and golf clubs.

Vermont's cold winters necessitate a large collection of scarves, hats and gloves. Each family member has three drawers in a built-in dresser. Winter weather also brings wet clothes — radiant floors dry up residual moisture. The location of the laundry facilities within the mud room make it easy to toss wet, sweaty, dirty clothes right into the wash.

Freeman positioned a large mirror by the front door, ideal for a quick check before heading out. Bins and shelves by the front door put items that need to be returned, such as a library book, in view.

■ Plan for the future.

"A lot of people make the mistake of planning for the moment," Freeman said. Although you might have grade-schoolers who play soccer and T-ball now, in a few years your teens might be playing other sports and have different storage needs. To accommodate future needs, Freeman made the shelves adjustable and planned the space to work for activities in every season.

■ Maximize space.

Freeman utilized every square inch of space from floor to ceiling with cabinets high and low. She maximized functional storage space in the cubby/locker system with shelves that are deep enough for two sets of shoes front to back, numerous hooks for jackets and bags, and functional cubbies that divide each locker and provide space for sun block, tissues, toys and sunglasses. Overhead cabinets with closed doors provide adjustable shelving to hold helmets, sports gear such as skates, and extra bags.

In the laundry closet, closed doors hide the side-by-side washer and dryer. Overhead storage houses laundry supplies, cleaning products and household items such as light bulbs and paper goods.

■ Don't neglect aesthetics.

Freeman wanted her home's entry to be welcoming and functional. The warm maple wood, large windows and bright "dill pickle" walls make the space inviting and echo the materials used throughout the rest of the house.

"I wanted it to look like built-in furniture, not cabinetry," said Freeman, gesturing to the cubbies and dressers. She achieved a comfortable look with details — a wooden "X" on the back wall of the cubbies evokes the look of a barn, a slate switch plate and rustic knobs add texture, and retractable doors for the laundry closet are practical and create a clean look.

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