



Group helps homeowners in need of aid

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12/19/2001
Community

The Brady Heights home of Sarah Hall (left) received renovations earlier this year from Rebuilding Together Tulsa, a local non-profit agency that makes repairs to the homes of elderly and disabled residents in financial need. Rebuilding Together Tulsa members Deanna Boston, John Fisher and Wayne Bagby show off the new back porch staircase that volunteers from their organization and the QuickTrip Corporation built for Hall.

CARY ASPINWALL/Tulsa World

Less than a year ago, the back porch steps to 88-year-old Sarah Hall's Brady Heights home were in such dangerous condition that they caused her to fall and injure herself. Several of the main walls of the house were cracked and her bathroom needed a total overhaul. However, Hall could not physically or financially afford to do the work herself.

In stepped Rebuilding Together Tulsa, a local nonprofit agency that makes much-needed repairs to the homes of elderly and disabled residents in financial need. Thanks to a team of volunteers from Rebuilding Together Tulsa and the QuickTrip Corporation, Hall has a resurfaced front porch, a newly remodeled bathroom, walls without major structural cracks -- and a sturdy new set of steps to her back porch. "The people who worked on the house -- they were very nice," Hall said. "They did a real good job, and I'm real proud of it."

Rebuilding Together Tulsa is taking applications through Dec. 30 for its 2002 projects. The group helps elderly and disabled homeowners within Tulsa city limits who need home repairs they cannot do on their own or afford to hire someone to do.

Homes are selected from the pool of applicants after a personal visit by Rebuilding Together Tulsa board members to determine need and the extent of work.

The Tulsa group is part of a national organization that repairs homes such as Hall's nationwide annually on the last Saturday in April. The Tulsa group hopes to repair 22 homes for the 2002 work date. This year, volunteers refurbished 13 homes. "Improving safety for the residents is a main concern," said John Fisher, president of Rebuilding Together Tulsa.

Individuals and groups of volunteers from different companies pool together on the work date to try to make as big of a difference as possible in one day. "Sometimes the scope of a project is so big it's beyond the capabilities of the volunteer teams," said Wayne Bagby, board member of RTT. "That's one of the questions we have to ask in selecting the houses -- can the volunteers do the work in one day?" Bagby said the majority of houses selected need painting, cleaning up and many minor repairs. But, in a few cases in the five years since the group started in Tulsa, volunteers have done larger overhauls and repairs.

The QuickTrip team that worked on Hall's house also installed a window-unit air conditioner for her.

"Some sponsors go the extra mile," Bagby said.

Fisher said the organization is trying to target specific neighborhoods.

Of the 13 homes refurbished by the group in 2001, at least five were in Brady Heights, he said. The neighborhood north of downtown Tulsa has a heritage going back to the early 1900s, according to a city of Tulsa historic publication. It is roughly located between Cheyenne and Denver avenues between Marshall and Edison streets.

Fisher said some people apply to the program on their own and others have been encouraged to request help through various neighborhood organizations, the Department of Human Services and Tulsa Senior Services.

"We've been working on setting up a partnership with social service agencies who have the same pool of clients," Fisher said.

Lorene Andrews, whose house just north of Brady Heights was one of the 2001 projects, said she wouldn't have known about the organization if it weren't for a representative from Tulsa Senior Services.

The work the volunteers did was good, Andrews said.

"I still need some help with my bathroom," she said. "But I love the door they put in."

Volunteers who worked on Andrews' house installed a new storm door for her back door, allowing her to keep an eye on her sister she takes care of while doing chores around the house.

The volunteers also made repairs to Andrews' roof, ensuring that she would be able to keep her homeowners' insurance current.

In addition to new rain gutters and interior carpeting, the volunteers painted Andrews' outside trim and several inside walls -- and they left paint for her to do some additional work when she felt up to it.

"Even after (the volunteers) left, I was here painting and going on -- just like I was one of them," she said.

To find out more, call

579-9431.

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