

DeKalb's most-trusted news source » Organization helps build shelters to rebuild lives



A shelter operated by Solomon's Temple, a southwest Atlanta organization that provides transitional housing to women and children, recently received a fresh paint job and other improvements with help from Tucker-based HomeAid Atlanta and workers from Sherwin-Williams' Pro Painters Institute Painter Training Program.

The project, which was completed Feb. 24, is the first of approximately 10 HomeAid Atlanta Care Days planned for 2016. "Typically, we do six to 10 Care Day projects a year," said Jean Hilyard, HomeAid Atlanta director of community engagement.

HomeAid Atlanta, founded in 2001, is a nonprofit organization that assists homeless families and individuals through housing and community outreach. Housed in the same building with the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association, HomeAid Atlanta works in partnership with the association and other building industry organizations to provide charitable assistance to the temporarily homeless. Through Care Days, short-term projects are completed using volunteer labor and donated materials. The Solomon's Temple project, for example, took six days.

In addition to its Care Days, HomeAid works year-round to reduce the cost of construction and remodeling for organizations that serve homeless people. Hilyard cited another recent project through which HomeAid was able to reduce the cost to the service provider of building a shelter by 45 percent because of industry donations.

"With charitable organizations, every dollar counts, so reducing the cost of building or remodeling a

facility by 40, 50, 60 percent or more means there is more money available to help the service provider's clients," Hilyard said. "On Care Days, 100 percent of the costs are covered through donated materials and volunteer labor, and for larger projects, the costs are significantly reduced."



Volunteers from Paran Homes, Smith Douglas Homes, Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association and other organizations display a sign that summarizes their commitment to projects to help the homeless.

HomeAid Atlanta is an affiliate of HomeAid, started in 1989 in California by a building industry association that invited its members to give products and service to community nonprofits. The national organization now has 16 chapters in communities throughout the United States.

"They discovered that many companies prefer giving this way to simply donating money," Hilyard explained, adding that donations of materials and labor from local and national partners make large and small projects possible.

"Those in the building and remodeling industries already have the expertise to build and renovate shelters for America's homeless families. Many people working in those industries are willing to give their time and skill to help their communities," she said. "Even office workers, who may not have specific construction skills such as plumbing or electrical work, often help with cleaning and painting.

"One of our challenges is to match the needs of a service provider with the volunteer help and donated materials that are offered," she added.

Many circumstances leave people in need of temporary shelter, including domestic violence and abuse, job loss, readjustment after military service and natural or manmade disasters, she said. These are the people HomeAid seeks to help, Hilyard explained, adding "HomeAid takes great pride in assisting families with obtaining dignified housing, whether we're building a new facility or helping upgrade a current one."

Hilyard cited Decatur Cooperative Ministries (DCM), a transitional housing program with eight homes in DeKalb County, as one of several nonprofits HomeAid Atlanta works with to return people to stable lives.

In a statement quoted on HomeAid Atlanta's website, Beth Van of DCM said, "Several years ago two of the older homes used by the program were in need of renovation and repair. HomeAid and its partners upgraded the houses, made them more energy efficient and the space much more functional and family friendly."

The website also quotes a client of DCM who was able to rebuild her life because of a partnership between HomeAid Atlanta and DCM. "My financial situation took a deep spiral downward and I just could not keep up with anything. I felt so depressed, but when I saw the HomeAid Atlanta-built Glenhill home, my spirits lifted," the woman states. "The home was beautiful. DCM offered counseling, financial classes, group support, home necessities and clothing. Since being at DCM I feel like I've had a new birth. My children are so happy now and I must say it's because their mother is happy, too."

Since its inception, HomeAid Atlanta has completed 53 housing, remodeling and care day projects. For more information, visit www.homeaidatlanta.org.

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