



60's Chicks perform for seniors

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Rebuilding Together gives local veteran a helping hand

By Devese "Dee" Ursery
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Kent Hollerbach is a Collinsville resident and Army veteran who has gone through his share of hardship.

Over the years he has suffered two strokes and endured several major surgeries. He takes care of his wife, who has some health concerns as well. Throughout most of his days, he also maintained his own home.

In recent years, however, his failing health has slowed him down.

Unable to keep up with some of the maintenance projects he could accomplish in his younger years, Hollerbach reached out to a local organization with the aim of helping the community with repairs.

"I had exhausted a lot of venues," Hollerbach said. "It was pointed out to me about Rebuilding Together through different contacts and people I would talk to."

Rebuilding Together is a nonprofit organization that focuses on helping citizens remain in their homes by completing needed repairs. Mobility items and upkeep that residents can't afford themselves. Examples of these projects are wheelchair ramps, sidewalk repair, window and door replacement and many more.

Chris Azar, president of Rebuilding Together, said the role of the organization is to provide free home repair services to seniors, veterans, low income and homeowners in Madison County. He said the organization was established in 1993, but became an all-volunteer organization in 2019.

"Our mission statement is repairing homes, revitalizing communities and rebuilding lives," Azar said.

To help with Hollerbach's home, Rebuilding Together of Southwest Illinois teamed up with Gateway Family

Church of Glen Carbon and Home Depot to help. The bathroom and hallway reconstruction project began on April 6 and will be completed on April 15. The project was funded by a grant from the Home Depot Foundation.

"I have never been so amazed and so thankful," Hollerbach said. "Quite truthfully, I don't know how else to answer, it was a true blessing."

Greg Morrison, pastor of Gateway Family Church, which also assisted with Hollerbach's home, said that ministry to veterans is at the forefront of the church's outreach. And many of those ministering to veterans in the community are veterans themselves.

"We just want to be able to tell the veterans that we appreciate their service and we love them, besides a national holiday," Morrison said.

Sara Washington, volunteer and Gateway Family Church member said that the church partnered with Rebuilding Together because they already have people in position and they allow us the opportunity to just come in and get to work.

Volunteers donate many hours of their time to help residents in the community and come from Scott Air Force Base, Olin Winchester, Phillips 66/Wood River Refinery, FGM Architects, Vavoline Oil, Home Depot and Gateway Family Church and other businesses and walks of life.

"We can make an impact on a veteran's life that day," Washington said.

The organization, according to Azar, is also important to the community because far too often seniors have to delay getting their homes repaired because of medical and living expenses. He said when the home doesn't undergo routine maintenance it begins to deteriorate.



Rebuilding Together 1: Members from the Gateway Family Church pose in front of a dumpster they recently filled, from left to right; Abraham Washington, Sara Washington and Pastor Greg Morrison (photo by Devese "Dee" Ursery)

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Veteran

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Azar explained one case they had last year where a senior's porch was falling from her house. He said she wasn't getting her mail because her porch was deemed too unsafe.

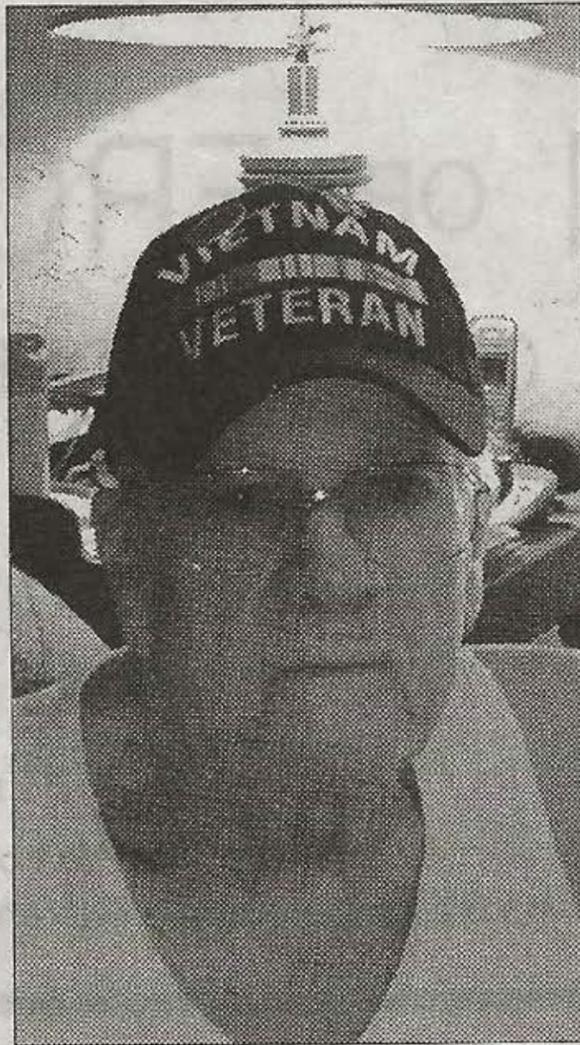
"We went in there, tore it down the old porch and rebuilt," Azar said.

Last year was the first year that Rebuilding Together partnered with the Agency for Community Transit, which funded most of the wheelchair ramp program in 2022. Azar said that ACT has a program that provides assistance to the mobility impaired to get them to their doctor's appointment and take them shopping.

"Wheelchair ramps are probably our biggest item that we get feedback on because they make such a big life difference," Azar said. "When folks can't get out of their house, they don't feel safe."

Rebuilding Together did over 90 projects in 52 homes last year. Azar said from 2015-2019, the organization averaged 8 projects during those years, but in 2020 they worked on 17 homes. The following year it jumped to 36 homes.

At this time, the organization is only accepting requests for assistance from homeowners in Madison County.

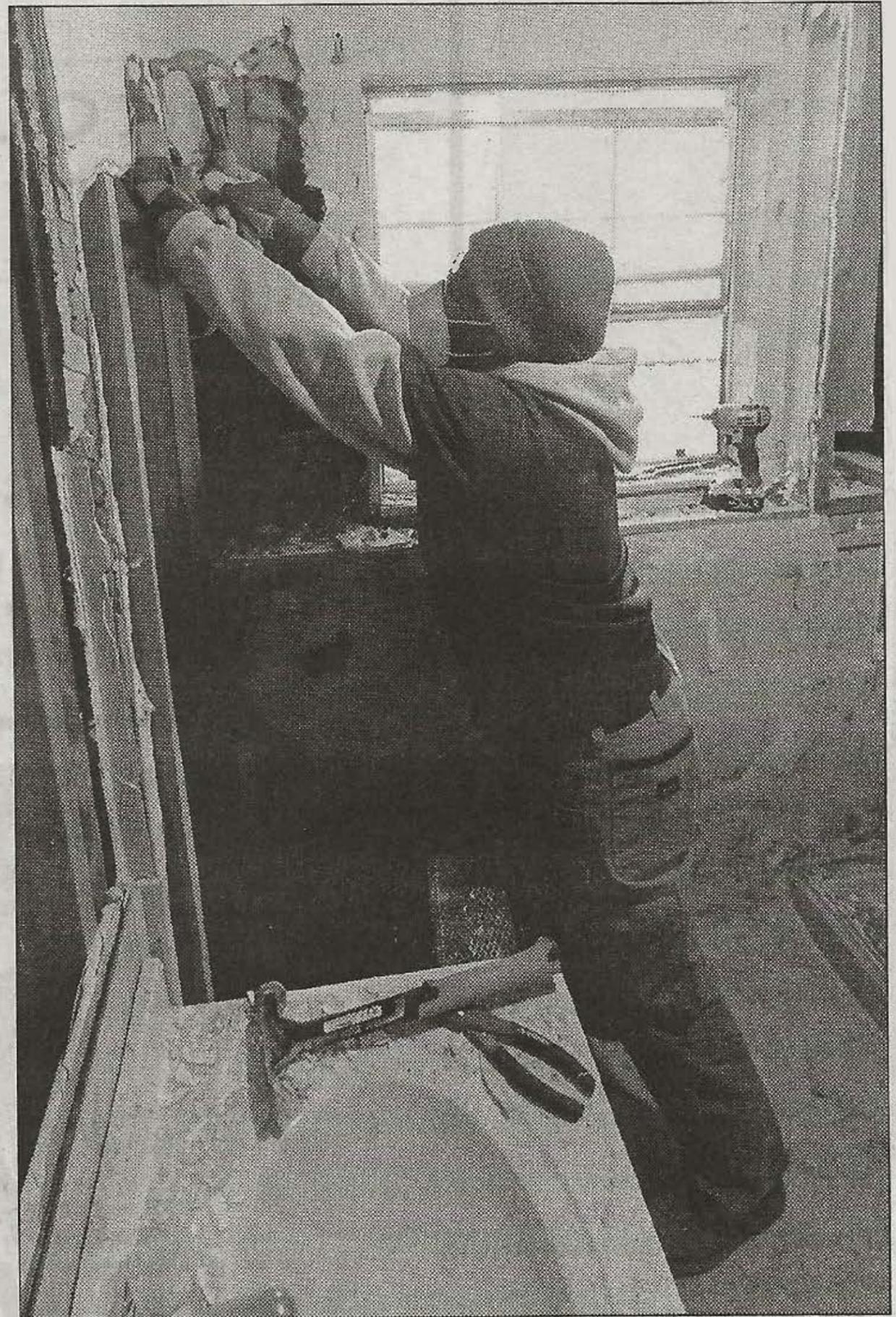


Kent Hollerbach - S/A, photo by Devese Dee" Ursery

Also homeowners must have insurance and be up-to-date on their taxes.

"As of April 5, we have done 28 projects in 12 homes," Azar said. "We have taken in 33 additional requests for assistance. Each of these requests can equate to multiple projects for us."

"We just finished a project in Collinsville for a wheelchair ramp, but we also fixed his kitchen lights. We count that as two projects in one home," he said.



Abraham Washington, volunteer and Gateway Family Church member does demolition on the bathroom wall, photo by Devese "Dee" Ursery