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Students through Habitat help renovate church

By Jennifer Reeger

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Sunday, October 14, 2007

Local college students were itching to build a house for Habitat for Humanity when they returned to school this fall.

While the Central Westmoreland County chapter of the charity doesn't have a project at the moment, they did find a house the students could work on -- a house of God.

On Saturday, students from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg's Habitat for Humanity campus affiliate volunteered their time to fix up the Greater Faith Hope and Love Temple in Jeannette, a nondenominational church that opened its doors in August.

"It's a good way to give back to the community and get involved," said Melissa Wojtaszek, 21, of Holsopple in Somerset County, who serves as president of the Habitat student chapter at Pitt-Greensburg. "It's something to do other than sleep in on a Saturday."

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Volunteer efforts

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They were busy Saturday morning scraping paint from basement walls to ready them for painting and removing old doors and ceiling tiles.

Christian Norfleet and his wife, Beverly, of Greensburg are renting the building and found it needed some minor repairs -- painting and woodwork mostly.

They asked Habitat for Humanity for help.

Leyla Pilon, executive director of the Central Westmoreland Chapter of Habitat for Humanity, said the group is in the process of finding a partner family for its next house project. Since there is nothing to work on, she agreed to coordinate the college chapters to do work at the church.

"We have a bunch of college kids who are really eager to do some work," Pilon said. "I thought this would be a great project for them to do. This is not something we would normally do, but it's a great cause. We are a faith-based organization, and they are trying to put together a start-up church."

Christian Norfleet said the help will give the church a "good foundation."

While Habitat provided the volunteers, the Norfleets provided the supplies.

He and his wife work during the day, so finding the time to make the repairs was difficult.

"It's pretty much starting from scratch," he said of the church. "We're starting out by faith, but the Lord has been truly blessing us sending us people."

In coming weekends, students from St. Vincent College and Seton Hill University will join in the work, Pilon said. Those students were on break and unavailable yesterday.

Pilon expects the church renovations will take three or four work days.

She said the local Habitat chapter is considering expanding from its typical mission of building new homes for low-income families by renovating homes.

"I think this is a great way to get our feet wet to work with a local church and see how it works," Pilon said of the renovation project.

Wojtaszek said it was a good feeling to work at the church yesterday.

"We didn't get to build yet, so this is great," she said.

The students enjoyed themselves too.

"Anything else to hammer? That was fun," said Kara Krivus, 21, of Connellsville, who just joined the chapter and was on her first building project.

Norfleet said he hopes the church, which now offers services three days a week, will be able to serve as a community outreach center, where people can go for help with food, clothing and shelter.

He said the help the church is getting from the students will go a long way.

"That's the way it should be," he said. "When people give to us, we are supposed to give back."

Jennifer Reeger can be reached at jreeger@tribweb.com or 724-836-6155.

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