

# Ramp is 'a blessing' to Roachdale family

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ROACHDALE -- A father and son in Roachdale are looking at the world through bright eyes after the kindness of volunteers from a local church over the weekend.

Servants at Work (SAWs) volunteers from Greencastle Presbyterian Church spent Friday and Saturday constructing a ramp at the home of Bruce Donaldson and son Bren Donaldson. For Bruce, the simple ability to walk safely off his porch and enjoy the outdoors is amazing.

"It means everything," Bruce said. "Being disabled, you're already locked down a little bit. Being able to go outside is just everything."

Since 1996, Bruce has suffered from a degenerative condition that affects his ability to walk. Although he's able to walk with a cane, traversing the porch steps and stepping stones was treacherous.

"I've fallen several times on the porch getting up the steps," Bruce said.

"My dad walked the stones, and they'd get slick in the winter," Bren said. "It wasn't good."

It got even worse this spring when Bruce began suffering from neuropathy in his feet, leaving him unable to walk for three months.

"I had to look out my door and just watch cars go by," he said.

However, his trials led a friend to show him an advertisement for the SAWs program. Bruce thought he might be a candidate for a ramp.

"I thought, if I could get some help, and if something happened to me again, I wouldn't just have to sit at the front door," Bruce said.

"I'm a prideful person," he added. "I've never taken advantage of the system. I think it's for people who need it, and I needed this."

The people from SAWs simply see it as a chance to help someone in need. Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis started the program. When a need came up in the Greencastle area, they sent a call out to the local church.

The pastor at the time called on John Anderson, a deacon at the church who is also a retired engineer.

The Greencastle SAWs group has completed just two ramps, but has four more in the works. Anderson foresees things continuing to pick up.

"We're in this, I think, for the long haul," Anderson said. "As our pastor Wes (Kendall) says, 'This is Godly.'"

Although Anderson, who is also a wood worker, spearheads the project, a number of volunteers take part. While most are novices at woodworking and carpentry, Anderson trains them in the skills to be vital parts of the projects.

"What I try to do is train everybody," Anderson said.

His trainees include schoolteachers, retirees and even a 78-year-old woman among the hammers and power tools. The volunteers are doing jobs they might never imagine in their professional lives.

"Some of these people like Bob (Stark), he used to teach science at DePauw, and he's got skills we didn't even know he had," said Sharon Pitcock, a retired English teacher and fellow volunteer.

Although the Greencastle program remains fledgling, it is part of a larger group that also includes Second Presbyterian and St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis.

Anderson made sure to say the goal is not to compete with contractors or with other charitable groups doing construction outreach projects. On the contrary, he said they have talked with Table Talk Ministries and Rebuilding Together Owen-Putnam and are willing to help them if their projects require ramps.

Anyone interested in learning more about the program and those in need of the service may call the Greencastle Presbyterian Church office at 653-5713.

What is most remarkable about the program is the way everyone involved walks away with a better feeling about themselves and the world.

"We have benefitted from this at least as much as the people we've built them for," Pitcock said.

"Bless everybody that's helping us. It's a really big help," Bren said.

But Bruce, who stands to benefit the most, has the best perspective on the completed project.

"For them to take time out of their busy schedules and do this for somebody in need is beyond me," Bruce said. "I will definitely return it. I will find a way to pass it forward. I believe that's what makes the world go round."

"It goes to show that there are still beautiful people in the world."