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[HELPING THE WHEELCHAIR BOUND]

Center for Independent Living on Ramp-Building Frenzy

By [Eric Pera](#)

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LAKELAND | John Hurt cites lots of stories about people who seldom leave home because they're stuck in wheelchairs and can't afford a ramp.

"Rampage," an annual event of the Center for Independent Living, aims to alleviate the situation.

Throughout the next two weeks, the nonprofit center that assists and advocates for the disabled in seven Central Florida counties, including Polk, will build 20 ramps to showcase its services.

Construction is made possible through corporate and individual donations and volunteer labor, all of which is in short supply.

"With the bad economy our donations and grants are down," said Hurt, site manager for the center's Lakeland office, which oversees services in Polk, Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties.

The agency, which is headquartered in Winter Park, also serves Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties.

Besides erecting wooden ramps, the Center for Independent Living assists the disabled with employment, housing, home and vehicle equipment modifications, mental health counseling and other needs.

It also collects used wheelchairs and other equipment for distribution to the poor.

But one of the center's more popular services is building affordable ramps that meet the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act. A single ramp can exceed \$3,000, but the center builds them for free or at a nominal cost.

There's usually a waiting list of 40 or more, said Hurt, adding that he has only enough funds to build 10 ramps this year.

That's why donations are so critical, he said, along with volunteer labor, which reduces costs so more can be helped.

"The typical customer is somebody who has a disability, is on Social Security and a fixed income," Hurt said.

Anyone can find himself disabled and wheelchair-bound, he said, permanently or temporarily.



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John Hurt, Site Manager for the Center for Independent Living, stands on a wheelchair ramp built by his agency at the 'The Way House' in Haines City FL., Monday February 14, 2011.

"Either way, they must have access to their homes."

For more information, call Hurt at 863-413-2722; e-mail jhurt@cilorlando.org; or visit www.cilorlando.org.

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