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Hank DeVries, top, and Dick Sears of Carpenters for Christ make a ramp for Angela Lindeman in Leesburg, on Friday, July 16, 2010. The group lends their assistance to disabled people in the community.

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Carpenters for Christ hammering for needy

THERESA CAMPBELL

Staff Writer

LEESBURG -- Angela Lindeman was delighted to go to church.

"It was nice to be able to get out of the house," the Leesburg amputee said Sunday, thrilled by the chance to be more independent. She no longer has to worry about a dangerous steep slope of the aluminum ramp that was on the house that she and her husband, Jeff, moved into two weeks ago.

Carpenters for Christ, a group of retirees, donated their time and materials to build Angela a new wheelchair-accessible, 16-foot ramp with pressure-treated yellow wood.

"They did a good job," she said.

It was 10 years ago, Angela recalled, when she was 28 and struck by a teenage driver while she was crossing a street in Orlando. She was hospitalized for months.

"I've had to make a lot of adjustments," she said, adding that it's people like the volunteer carpenters that have become a blessing in her life.

"We're helping somebody that needs help," Don Hill said of Carpenters for Christ, a group that began around 1992, and constructs two to three ramps a month for anyone who is mentally, physically or financially challenged.

Wiping sweat from his face while cutting wood for the ramp, Hill said Friday's sweltering heat didn't matter.

"You go through life and you get a lot of things given to you, and so when you retire, you can give back," Hill said. "Unfortunately, in the center of Florida there are a lot of people who are need."

"This is what the Lord wants me to do," said Dick Sears, who has been involved with the group since 1999. "The only reason I'm here on this Earth is to work for him, so I volunteer to help people."

Carpenters for Christ has worked as far away as Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi and West Virginia.

"In our heyday, when the economy was good and there was a lot of money coming in, we would build a house in 15 days," Hill said of the group's work to build homes for those living in the Appalachians.

The slugging economy has affected the number of the group's building projects, yet the carpenters strive to provide as many ramps as they can. Some people who can't pay for the \$300 to \$400 in wood receive their ramps for free.

"We're doing something for people who really, really need it," Russ Chinni said. "When they come down the

ramp for the first time, it's really rewarding. They're free to leave their house and go somewhere, even if it's to go down the street."

Chinni became involved in the group six years ago.

"I've been coming back ever since," he said.

More volunteers are invited to get involved.

"We're always looking for people," Hill said; Carpenters for Christ has about 25 members, while about 10 people do

90 percent of the work.

"We teach you what to do," he said, Volunteers do not have to be experienced carpenters. "We teach you how to cut, and we use a lot of power tools, which makes it a lot easier for a novice."

The carpenters also have their own store -- Carpenters for Christ Thrift Shop -- located behind New Life Presbyterian Church in Fruitland Park, where items are sold from 8 a.m. to noon on Thursdays. Proceeds from the shop pay for the group's lumber and building supplies.

Those interested in getting involved in the ministry may call Hank DeVries, construction manager, at 750-1370.



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