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Volunteers build handicap ramps for county residents

June 19, 2013

By DAVE GOSSETT - Staff writer (dgossett@heraldstaronline.com), The Herald-Star

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STEUBENVILLE - Megan Schlas carefully held a support post level as her friends started putting the floorboards on a new wooden ramp at a Pittsburgh Street residence.

The Chardon, Ohio, native is spending a week in Steubenville as part of a 48-member youth mission trip to build handicap accessible ramps for qualified Jefferson County residents.

"It feels really good to help people. Lots of people need a ramp at their homes but may not be able to afford one. The lady at this house is really nice and she is excited about having a handicap ramp for her home," the Chardon High School freshman explained.

Article Photos



BUILDING A RAMP — Raquel Snidely, left, of Chardon and Nathan Dolinar of Willoughby Hills prepared to

Mission leader Patrick Schaeffer said the Chardon-based volunteers from Geauga County churches have been building handicap accessible ramps and doing home renovations for 19 years.

"We were working in the New Philadelphia area last year and were contacted by Beth Rupert-Warren of the United Way of Jefferson County who asked us to come here this year. Right now we are in the middle of six projects and should have nine projects completed by the time we leave Saturday," explained Schaeffer.

"We have a fundraiser every spring and the kids pay their own way to be here for the week. And we supply the tools and lumber. This is free to the residents. All we ask for is patience because we are volunteers, not professional carpenters," noted Schaeffer.

"We built two small ramps Monday. But it usually takes two to three days to complete a larger ramp," he said.

Schaeffer said the Society for Equal Access reviews applications to determine who is eligible for the wooden ramps.

Paula Kovach of Fowlers Mill Christian Church in Geauga County was one of two adult volunteers at the Pittsburgh Street worksite.

"The woman here needs a ramp because she needs help when she goes to the doctor. This will make it a lot easier for her to get out of

her home. She is very excited about this project," said Kovach, who is participating in her seventh mission trip.

"We are staying at the Wintersville United Methodist Church where they have been very friendly. We will finish our work Friday and will clean up Saturday and go home. And I hope we leave people with good memories of our mission trip," Kovach said.

"We had to do a couple switchbacks on this ramp so it wasn't too steep. And we have young Alex Sulka here this week. Normally he would be practicing his basketball, but he wanted to join us on this trip. We are supposed to be out of our comfort zone, so instead of playing on a basketball court Alex is working here this week," cited adult volunteer Scott Liechty.

"I wanted to volunteer for God and to help people who have a disability," the Chardon High School student said.

According to Raquel Snidely of Chardon, "this is a good way to relax after school is finished. I like to help people, and this is a good way to get back into my faith after school is out for the summer."

And Rupert-Warren could not be more pleased with the week-long mission trip.

"This is another wonderful opportunity to network with people outside of our community. The volunteers have told me they have been very impressed by the friendliness and warmth they have found in our community. I have coordinated with the Wintersville United Methodist Church for sleeping arrangements and the Wintersville Fire Department, Elite Fitness, the YMCA and the YWCA for showers," explained Rupert-Warren.

"This is an example of the unity in our community. We have volunteers coming to Jefferson County and kids from Jefferson County going on mission trips in other communities," said Rupert-Warren.

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