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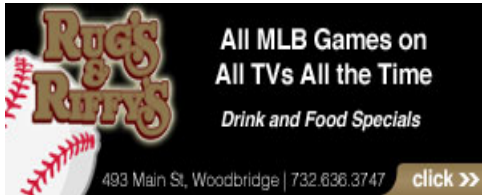
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"Tooling" Program Frees Disabled Seniors to Stay in their Homes

More than 165 seniors and disabled residents of Woodbridge have benefited from the Tooling Around the Township program since 2000.

By [Deborah Bell](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 8, 2011

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Rae Rocuzzo (left) and Camille Vineyard (right), daughters of Teresa Pecora (seated), who were at her home as it was refurbished with a new ramp by the Tooling Around the Township volunteers. Credit: [Deborah Bell](#)

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It only takes a few seconds to amble up the five stairs to Teresa Pecora's front door and ring the doorbell to her neat Cape Cod home on West Hill Road in Colonia.

Over the years, though, that same short flight of stairs has turned into an impediment of Mount Everest proportions for Mrs. Pecora. That's because 90-year-old homeowner who relies on a walker to get around inside her home and a wheelchair for outside treks was rarely able to make it down those stairs.

"It was a chore getting her out," said Rae Rocuzzo, Pecora's adult daughter who lives in Manalapan.

Since last Saturday, it's not a chore any longer.

That was when a team of volunteers from Woodbridge's Tooling Around the Township program descended on Mrs. Pecora's home and gave her her freedom via well-built wooden ramp they constructed in less than a day.

"We did some landscaping, put in a new door, and a small deck," counted Jim Kerins, one of the laborers from the American Irish Association, the organization which ponied up the day's volunteers to work on Mrs. Pecora's abode. "Oh, and the ramp."

Mrs. Pecora, active and bright, sat at her kitchen table the entire day, while she could barely contain her excitement at her new-found freedom and her gratitude for the volunteers who helped make it possible.

"They're beautiful people. Beautiful. They did a beautiful job," Mrs. Pecora enthused.

Roccuzzo and Camille Vineyard, another Pecora daughter from Avenel, had nothing but praise for the work and professionalism of the American Irish Association group, and for the township program that made the ramp possible.

"This is freedom for her. I wish my town offered a program like this," Roccuzzo said, who gave kudos for the help she got from Donna Brightman of the Woodbridge Housing Authority, the organization which administers the program.

Begun in 2000, the Tooling program was started by former mayor and governor Jim McGreevey as a one-day, all-out mission to help cash-strapped seniors and disabled in Woodbridge with desperately needed repairs on their homes. Since its inception, the program has helped 165 township residents, according to township spokesman John Hagerty.

That includes modifying homes with ramps so that seniors and disabled residents can stay in place and not have to give up their dwellings. Much of the materials for the projects was donated by local stores, such as Home Depot.

Twelve homeowners and non-profit groups were helped this year by the program.

A few blocks away in another part of Colonia, another crew was taking care of a myriad of repairs to the home of 90-year-old Julia Ryan.

Tim Joyce was cleaning up after making a completely seamless repair to a hole in the rear of the Ryan home. Joyce, the owner of TJ Superior Exteriors, has been volunteering for the Tooling program for the past five years.

"It's part of giving back," he said.

One of the busiest workman on the crew, ripping lumber and measuring for the last details on a front porch that was completely reconstructed, was Jim Nolan, who sponsored the team that worked on the Ryan residence.

Nolan isn't a professional woodworker, but he could be. He's been a volunteer with the Tooling program since it began. He's also the township attorney.

"My father as pretty handy. I learned it from him," said Nolan, pointing to a ton of power tools spread out nearly on the lawn that were mostly his.

"I enjoy the woodworking, and I enjoy helping people who need help," he said.

There's no doubt that the Tooling program has had a huge effect. Teresa Pecora tried it out instantly.

"It's good that she gets out, gets some fresh air, enjoys the sunshine," smiled Roccuzzo.

Pecora wants to do a bit more. Freed from her home by the ramp, she'll be able to do one of her favorite things - visit her late husband at the cemetery.

"I love it," Mrs. Pecora said.

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