

Martin

COUNTY

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Volunteers grow with makeover



GUY KITCHENS/SPECIAL TO TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

Curtis Sapusek (center), along with other volunteers, prepares to plant a new tree in the backyard of an East Stuart resident's home during the Extreme Martin Makeover on Saturday morning.

By Paul Ivce

Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers

STUART — More than 700 volunteers worked Saturday to repaint and landscape 40 East Stuart homes as part of the Extreme Martin Makeover.

The annual beautification project has grown considerably in a short time.

It sprang from a 2009 makeover of the Gertrude Walden Child Care Center by about 120 volunteers in 2009.

After that, Frank Neff started Habitat Angel, a faith-based nonprofit committed to working with churches, civic organizations, governments and individuals to repair and rejuvenate homes, buildings and, ultimately, people's lives.

Last year, about 400 people, including volunteers from two churches, turned out to work on 17 homes.

This time, with 13 churches involved, the ranks of volunteers almost doubled.

Habitat Angel board member Thelma Washington, who is

also executive director of the Gertrude Walden center, described the turnout as "wonderful."

"We have definitely served our purpose, beautifying East Stuart and helping residents improve their quality of life by beautifying their environment," Washington said.

Some volunteers, like David Phillips of Vero Beach, came from outside Martin County.

Phillips, a civil engineer, said he has been involved in similar projects elsewhere, but this was his first participation in the Extreme Martin Makeover.

At a house in the 500 block of Cortez, Phillips did painting, landscaping and general clean-up under house captain Mike Owen, a land surveyor from Palm City.

"When you get 10 to 15 people working together, you can really accomplish a lot and get a really good makeover of a house," Phillips said.

Kali DeWindt, a third-grade teacher at J.D. Parker Elementary, and her father, Dana, helped

out for the second year because "a lot of my students live in this neighborhood, that's why we're supporting this cause."

While older volunteers worked on homes, 15-year-old Shelby Bartuska was at Guy Davis Park where the volunteers came for a barbecue lunch. Bartuska painted faces and otherwise entertained younger children, many of whom were waiting for the start of Stuart's Easter Eggs-travaganza.

Among the appreciative homeowners was Sam McHardy, whose 106-year-old, three-bedroom house in the 800 block of Nassau Street got some painting touch-ups and landscaping.

A crew of about 15 people worked on McHardy's house and yard Saturday under the supervision of a house captain.

Of the 40 owner-occupied homes and three churches in East Stuart that received some attention Saturday, 30 received some exterior repairs and most of them were repainted using 225 gallons of paint, most of which had been

donated by Habitat for Humanity and Lowe's.

McHardy's house was originally built in Hobe Sound and moved by barge to Stuart in 1941, he said.

The house, which his father bought in 1954 and moved to East Stuart, was one of about 20 homes that received some exterior repairs last month by students from the Virginia Tech chapter of Navigators, which has been coming to the area during spring break for the past 15 years, said Steve Hooks, a Palm City-based general contractor who is one of the house captains.

McHardy, a retired disabled veteran, said the Virginia Tech group repaired some wood rot and termite damage. On Saturday, the local volunteers painted the trim and helped him with some landscaping.

"It was a godsend, getting done these things I couldn't have done myself," McHardy said.

Phillips said, "It's a nice feeling when you leave" a house that received the volunteers' makeover treatment.