

VOLUNTEERS HELP GIVE NEIGHBORHOOD NEW LOOK ANNUAL PROJECT SPRUCES UP HOMES IN LAUDERHILL FOR NO CHARGE

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Sylvester Bush has been displaced from her home lately, but she's happy about the payoff that's coming.

When the 85-year-old widow returned to her turquoise house Thursday, she smiled at construction crews ridding the place of old appliances in preparation for Saturday, when more improvements will come.

"This is one of the greatest things I've been able to witness in all my days," she said of work on her vacant 30-year home, which she says has sheltered her and her family through many storms.

Bush is among 15 homeowners in Lauderhill's St. George neighborhood whose homes are undergoing free extreme makeovers, thanks to an annual philanthropic event.

Rebuilding Together Broward County, a nonprofit organization, is conducting its annual Rebuilding Together Day on Saturday, when 300 volunteers are expected to make an estimated \$170,000 worth of improvements to 15 homes and St. George Catholic Church.

The group, which helps elderly, disabled or low-income residents by making their homes safe and sanitary, and other sponsors will install new cabinets, light fixtures, sinks, faucets, flooring, doors, stoves and other appliances. Its members also will replace broken windows and repair roofs. Handicapped people will get shower bars and accessible toilets.

The effort began about two weeks ago, when some volunteers began doing preliminary tasks, such as removing trash.

This is the ninth consecutive year the event has been held, said Dave Reieron, the group's executive director. Leadership Broward Foundation, another public-service group, organized it the first four years but Rebuilding Together has overseen the latter events, he said.

A neighborhood with residents who are poor, disabled, live in unsafe or unsanitary conditions, or face other challenges, is chosen each year. Residents' backgrounds, pay stubs or other paperwork are checked to verify they are in need, Reieron said. He added that some beneficiaries this year are all of the above: elderly, poor, disabled and living alone.

Volunteers who have participated in previous years say helping others is so enriching, it's addictive.

"If I couldn't do it through this organization, I would find another way to help people," said Lynn Stoner, a Plantation-based general contractor who plans to assign 15 workers to St. George on Saturday.

Bush, who has been temporarily staying with family in Oakland Park, on Thursday drove her daughter Mary Branch, 46, with whom she lives and who has Down syndrome, to an adult training center. She then visited her home, where she saw another daughter, Lorine Wright, 53, visiting from Tampa to help with the cleanup.

Wright said the house, now free of clutter and old furniture, has changed drastically.

"For us, the children, it's junk. But to our mom, it's precious memories," Wright said. "She'll miss it but she'll have better memories now."

Staff Researcher Barbara Hijek contributed to this report.

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INFORMATIONAL BOX:

Need home repairs?

Rebuilding Together Broward County, a nonprofit organization, has begun taking suggestions for which neighborhood's homes should be spruced up next year.

The group also is seeking volunteers, especially contractors, to improve homes. For either effort, call Dave Reieron, the group's executive president, at 954-462-6200, ext. 250.

Watch

A video report on improvements a nonprofit organization is making in Lauderhill at Sun-Sentinel.com

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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Photo(s); FRESH COAT OF PAINT: Jose Santos, of Margate, power sprays a house in the 3400 block of Northwest Eighth Court in preparation for painting. Fifteen homeowners in Lauderhill's St. George neighborhood are getting free extreme makeovers for their homes, thanks to an annual philanthropic event. Staff photo/Lou Toman
DEMOLITION CREW: Bill Binroth, of Fort Lauderdale, and Matt McAloon, of Plantation, remove kitchen cabinets in a home in the 3400 block of Northwest Eighth Court in Lauderhill. Rebuilding Together Broward County will conduct its annual Rebuilding Together Day on Saturday. Staff photo/Lou Toman
MAP: Locates St. George neighborhood