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Keeping Seniors Independent

Builders partner with nonprofit Partners In Care

Adele Brown no longer goes upstairs.

The 84-year-old Annapolis resident has suffered two bad falls, leaving her practically homebound.

But thanks to the Severna Park-based nonprofit Partners In Care, she can safely get in and out of the house on a wheelchair.

The nonprofit worked with some of the county's most prolific developers – **Koch Homes** and Reliable Contracting Co. – to build a nearly 25-foot wheelchair ramp on the back of Ms. Brown's Carrollton Avenue home.

Completed this summer, the project cost about \$10,000. Ms. Brown's wheelchair ramp is perhaps the best example of the organization's "Repairs with Care" program.

Builders and developers basically donate labor hours or money for at least one repair project a year. Partners In Care pays for materials and then works out a payment plan with homeowners who receive the help.

The program has helped seniors and disabled residents stay independent in their homes since 1997.

While many past projects have been smaller, Partners In Care has been able to take on much larger jobs like Ms. Brown's ramp thanks to a \$50,000 grant from Arundel Community Development Services, the county's housing and community development arm.

"It's just going to enable us to conquer some of the requests from seniors, and we have a whole lot of requests," said Linda Dennis, member care manager. "Many seniors aren't able to pay. We're just trying in anyway we can to get the job done."

The grant is paying for building materials to install things like new railings, indoor ramps and walk-in showers. The funds also have enabled Partners In Care to hire a manager for the program, Michael Helta, who began in September.

Repairs with Care's most active partner, **Koch Homes**, donated about 100 labor hours to Ms. Brown's wheelchair ramp. A private contractor would probably charge between \$40 and \$50 per hour for that work, or as much as \$5,000, said Wayne Harris, project manager for the Annapolis-based Koch Homes, which pulled a building permit for Ms. Brown's ramp and performed construction.

But Mr. Harris said the ramp is just one way Koch Homes gives back to the community.

"It gives us a feeling of satisfaction that we've helped someone out," he said.

A Koch Homes subcontractor, R&F Metals of Clinton, Md., installed the ramp's iron hand railing, which usually costs \$2,500. R&F Metals sold the railing to Partners In Care for about half that price.

Sturbridge Homes is a Gambrills-based home builder developing the GrandView luxury condos at the Annapolis Towne Centre at Parole complex.

Another major partner of the Repairs With Care program, the company built an outside ramp late last year for a wheelchair-bound woman living on Garden Gate Lane.

Working with subcontractors and an architect, Sturbridge donated about 100 hours toward the project, said Michael DeStefano, company president. The company has plenty of commitments, but contributing to the community is key.

"Our charitable contributions are just huge," Mr. DeStefano said. "That's just part of what being a good company is."

John Kortecamp, executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Maryland, said charitable activity is very common among the organization's 1,200 members, which include builders, suppliers, contractors and professional services companies.

"They're nice people," he said. "They do it because they've been asked to help and they have the experience and the resources available to them. They're part of the community."

Building a way.

Starting out in 1997 with a \$17,500 United Way grant, the Repairs With Care program has a network of about 15 organizations and companies helping with repair projects, Mr. Helta said.

By year's end, program officials and companies will have completed between 250 and 300 repair jobs around Anne Arundel County.

These jobs include "honey-do" tasks such as changing lights, fixing leaky faucets and replacing front doors – projects with an emphasis on safety and independence.

Started in 1993 by Barbara Huston, Sandra Jackson and Maureen Cavaiola, Partners In Care was designed to help seniors and disabled residents remain independent in their homes by helping with grocery shopping, transportation and other needs. Partners In Care provided 2,400 rides last year, Mr. Helta said.

The organization has grown significantly, now with 2,200 members, up from 25 members in 1993. Members can be a recipient of services at any time. In return for services, members can give back by donating cash, clothes or using their talents.

For example, an elderly woman can "exchange" the time she spent crocheting a blanket for the Partners In Care boutique – a fundraising arm of the group – to receive services from the organization, such as transportation, repair work or a trip to the grocery store.

"We try to be as diverse as possible so that somebody can give back," Mr. Helta said.

The hope is to expand the Repairs With Care program into Frederick County, where the organization plans to open a satellite office next month.

In the meantime, Partners In Care is working to expand its repair network with builders, electricians, plumbers and roofers, Mr. Helta said.

"There's a lot of need out there for these types of jobs," he said.

Ms. Brown said she was grateful for the wheelchair ramp.

"When I feel I'm not a burden on someone else, it makes me feel better," Ms. Brown said. "And it's beautiful."