

Team Creates a Home
Jacob's Ladder Draws from Mixed Faiths for Project
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Rotted wood was replaced in the kitchen before installing a new ceiling, and a breakfast bar was built for the children's study area. Alexandria and neighbor Robert Gaither check out the final product.



After removing the wall between the kitchen and living room to improve the layout, the sad state of the kitchen became clear.



CrossRoads Church member Jairus Durnett examines the walls of the living room on the first work day in August 2010.



On move-in day, the living room welcomed the family with cream-colored, insulated walls, a warm rug, comfy furniture and drapes.



Murray State volunteer Alex Mulvaney (left) and CrossRoads team leader Jairus Durnett work on sheetrock for Alexandria's room.



Alexandria's smiling face shows delight in the "very pink" room she requested. From a small, gray shell of a building, with windows and doors boarded up, to a family home -- that's the story of faith that is created by Jacob's Ladder.

Jacob's Ladder is a community development corporation affiliated with the United Methodist Church, located in the Beltline/Orange Mound area of Memphis, directed by Rev. Bill Marler of the Memphis Annual Conference.

A mother and her three children (ages 5, 11 and 12) were able to move into a house that had been transformed from derelict to delightful. Gone were the rotted floors and dirty patches of plaster, and in their place are new floors and walls that are insulated, drywalled and newly painted. The house now features a new roof and driveway, as well as monkey grass in the front lawn and a garden of greens planted in the back.

Every room is furnished, every bed made. Hand-sewn curtains hang over the new energy-efficient windows. Pictures and mirrors adorn the walls. There are toothbrushes in the new bathroom vanity, and both a kitchen pantry and linen closet are fully stocked.

Such is the result of an ecumenical project led by Jacob's Ladder. Volunteers from CrossRoads, Emmanuel and Germantown United Methodist churches; students from CBU, Americorp Vista and Murray State; carpenters, an electrical contractor, roofers, concrete layers, cabinet installers and neighbors of several faith backgrounds all came together over a four-month period to transform rather than destroy.

"It started out to be a one-day service project," said the Rev. Don Park of CrossRoads UMC, the church that played the lead role in this project. "But after seeing the house and hearing Bill Marler's dreams of its transformation, the folks of CrossRoads decided to make this a long-term project that would involve every member of the congregation."

But the giving went beyond skilled carpenters and painters. Others at CrossRoads volunteered to lead specific projects, while still others gave money and donations of furniture and accessories. An interior decorator from the church measured the house, drew up the plans and organized furniture procurement and placement. Folks dug monkey grass from their yards to re-plant here. Company owners supplied roofers, concrete, kitchen countertops and a bathroom vanity. The UMW provided staples for the food pantry. Folks donated pots and pans, dishes, glassware, cutlery - everything a cook will need.

Young and old showed up the day the interior was painted and on the final work day one week before Christmas, when the furniture and everything else was finally put in place.

One meaningful opportunity for the volunteers was interaction with the family and neighbors who showed up over a series of Saturday workdays to help where they could. One "worker bee" in particular, Jeanette, also a Jacob's Ladder home recipient, was a constant presence and hard for most folks to keep up with. Her work ethic was an inspiration.

Marler has a housing team of volunteers who regularly meet on Wednesdays. Led by Rev. Ken Burnette, board chairman of Jacob's Ladder, the team rebuilt all the windows and installed new flooring, drywall and an on-demand water heater. This newly refurbished home is the 14th total renovation in five years in the Beltline area, and the housing team has also completed significant repairs to 18 more residences, effecting a focused community impact.

Jacob's Ladder has programs in place to help new and prospective homeowners with budgeting and home upkeep. They also operate two after-school educational centers which provide safe sanctuary and learning opportunities for all the neighborhood children.

New life has been breathed into a community that has embraced this young family. Neighbors have pledged to look after them. The children are warm and safe, and home.

For more information about Jacob's Ladder, visit jacobsladdercdc.org or call 327-3771. Or visit CrossRoads UMC at crossroadsumc.com.

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