



# Habitat for Humanity®

Allegheny Valley

Summer/Fall

2017  
Newsletter

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## Strokes of Change collaborative works to change the community paradigm



The current overdose deaths in the United States have nearly tripled from 1990 to 2015, according to the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, with Pennsylvania ranked among the highest. With this understanding, Habitat for Humanity Allegheny Valley and Lost Dreams Awakenings have worked together to develop a united partnership that actively engages long-term addiction recovery participants in community service build efforts. In part, the Strokes of Change project initiative was crafted to holistically address the ever-changing and dynamic needs of the Allegheny Valley.

“In the midst of this opioid epidemic, all you hear about is death,” states Executive Director of Lost Dreams Awakening VonZell Wade. While the opioid epidemic has become a major challenge for the region, Strokes of Change has worked to engage over two dozen long term recovery participants to work and serve the disadvantaged families and elderly residents of the community with exterior home repair efforts.

“The idea is to engage the long term recovery participants into community efforts that assist in efforts to uplift. Such efforts will not only have a transformative impact on the community, but also serve to invoke purpose and passion for those going through the recovery process,” states Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity John Tamiggi.

The Strokes of Change Initiative launched in late spring of 2017, and was support directly by the Community Foundation of Westmoreland County

along with additional supports provided by Emmerson Electric and the PNC Foundation. Such a platform enabled ten underserved homeowners in the New Kensington and Arnold community to receive direct home repair assistance from the long term recovery participants. Volunteers Dennis Mialki and Chris Andring along with support by ReStore employee Sal Chiusano led the Strokes of Change initiative and engaged in projects that included but not limited to the creation of handicap ramps, porch and step repair to ensure accessibility, and sidewalk repair (cont. pg. 3).

## Work continues on Ridge Avenue in New Kensington while work commences in Natrona

Habitat crews remain busy as work continues at 644 Ridge Avenue with first phases of inspection successfully completed. Efforts at Ridge led by Rich Michaux has engaged various groups lending support including the University of Pittsburgh, First Energy Young Professionals, and other local groups.

Additionally, Habitat has commenced work at 48 Garfield in Natrona PA with construction efforts led by Dennis Mialki. The project on Garfield got a jump start when Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church dedicated over 40 volunteers for a week in June to serve in home construction efforts, along with supporting a Brush with Kindness campaign that assisted established residents with exterior home repair efforts. Sal Chiusano led several groups in the Brush with Kindness efforts and provided onsite training and mentoring. “Its amazing to see our youth work together from various backgrounds and help those less fortunate” stated Sal. (cont. pg. 2)





(cont. from pg. 1) Efforts at both properties will continue into the fall and winter of 2017. During this timeframe, the organization anticipates selecting qualified families that will take on ownership and residency of the home. “Our ultimate goal is to provide homeownership as a

catalyst to spawn holistic growth and development of the family unit,” states Executive Director John Tamiggi.

**In partnership with Plum Library, Habitat provides S.T.E.A.M. support for area youth**

When Plum Library established its “Build a Better World” initiative, it connected with Habitat for Humanity Allegheny Valley to provide youth S.T.E.A.M. (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) workshops. The workshops engaged area youth ages eight to fourteen into various hands on projects that provided educational enrichment while designing and creating various home necessities including a mailbox that will be donated to an underserved family.

Restore employee Kaitlin Opezy stated that she saw some wonderful engagement activities of the youth partaking in efforts that can create real change. It efforts like these that create platforms for healthy child development in our shared communities.

Additionally, Habitat hosted the Highlands Algebra Club as they took part in enhanced S.T.E.A.M. activity and exercises that brought real world mathematical scenarios in relation to home build and ownership. These opportunities provided outreach that empowered area youth to engage in efforts to transform the community.



**Brush with Kindness & Week of Hope together make a difference for those in need**

Henry Pieczynski has dedicated volunteer services for over two decades and this year embarked upon another journey leading dedicated groups of high school and college youth to serve disadvantaged families in the region with exterior home repair.

The Week of Hope is a collective faith based group of youth from various states across the country that come together to assist and make change by providing there passion to serve. The hot sun and high temperatures did not stop the groups’ commitment and were able to dedicate efforts to a half dozen home repair and community projects. Such efforts resonated throughout the community, as one porch repair project for an elderly resident spawned over 880 likes of facebook!

Assisting on the project development included the support of established volunteer Jamie Dillon who engaged the children in support efforts at St. Scholastica Church and ReStore Manager Val Chiusano who utilized the support of the youth to help reorganization efforts at the Restore.

Collectively, the Week of Hope initiative continues to show the best of today’s youth and illustrates the dynamic hope that our next generation holds. “Their efforts truly create actions that others in the community desire to emulate, these are our future leaders of tomorrow,” stated Val.

Efforts will continue in to the fall with hopes to meet the ever-increasing demand of homeowners in need of support. The organization has already started taking applications for assistance for 2018, and is available online at [www.habitatav.org](http://www.habitatav.org).



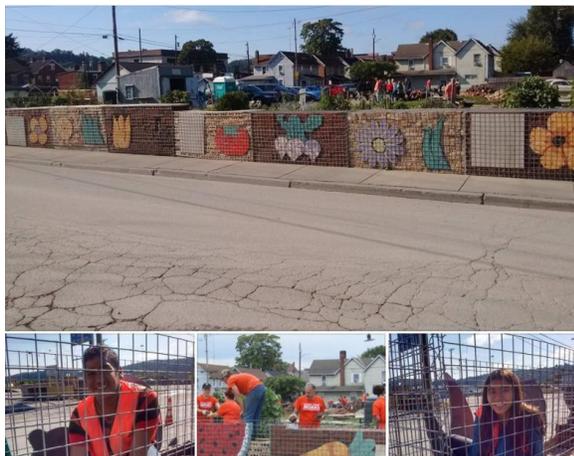
(cont. from pg. 1) To coincide with these impacts, the two dozen recovery participants were able not only garner purpose and develop self-esteem, but were also able to make significant strides in the recovery process that included job training and placement, halfway house to three quarter residency, and graduation of the Westmoreland Drug Court program along with opportunity for peer mentoring. Both Lost Dreams Awakening and Habitat for Humanity Allegheny Valley look forward to continuing the project into the 2018 calendar year.



### Unification wall

When Natrona Comes Together sought support to help build a protective wall that would ensure the safety of its neighborhood children, they looked no further than the amazing passionate hearts at Habitat for Humanity Allegheny Valley.

Executive Director Bill Godfrey connected with the organization and was able to receive direct support from the organization and access to its uniquely talented volunteers including Dennis Mialki, who not only designed the concept for the gabion wall, but also served as the construction lead and coordinator on the project. For years, the concern of the neighborhood garden was its close proximity to the ATI commercial truck weight station. Such concern beckoned support from neighborhood public and private partnerships to ensure the safety of the community.



The commitment spawned various support systems that have dedicated efforts to construct a wall that will not only serve as a safety guard for the residents, but also such community engagement illustrates the unification of a community. The project is scheduled to be completed in October/November of 2017.

### ReStore GO!

The ReStore continues to make significant strides forward as it works to convert the grounds into a user friendly retail space that allows residents of the community opportunity to find amazing deals on various home furnished goods and appliances.

While the ultimate goal of the ReStore is to generate revenue to support the organization's mission to provide housing opportunity to underserved members of the community, it also provides opportunity to utilize the sizable space to create workshop training opportunities, community planning space and various other engagements.

Additionally, the ReStore's serves as a community catalyst to recycle, reuse, and repurpose efforts. "The amount of consumer goods we are able to divert from area landfills is tremendous," states ReStore Manager Val Chiusano. The amount of materials diverted from area landfills last year amassed over 250,000 lbs.

Efforts continue into the fall as the ReStore and its employees work diligently to reorganize and create platforms that drive and enhance customer experience. Stay tuned for more updates!



**Restore**  
 225 Freeport Street  
 New Kensington, PA 15068  
 Hours of operations: Monday-Saturday  
 9am to 4pm  
 Phone: 724.337.8347

### Rich's Construction Corner

Construction Lead Rich Michuax provides some insightful homeownership tips for this fall.

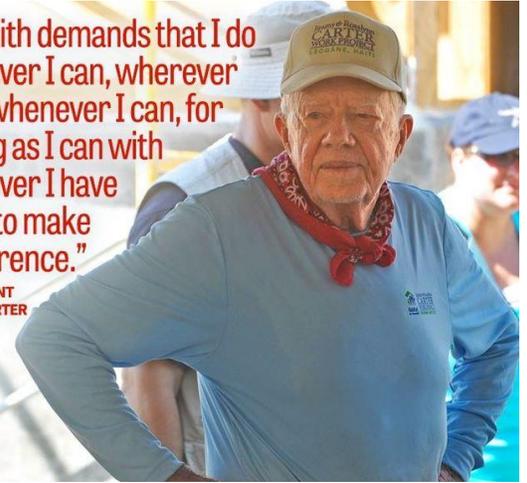


- Routinely clean gutters and downspouts. Consider installing gutter guards can make the job easier.
- A screwdriver can come in handy to probe the wood trim around windows, doors, railings and decks. Caulk can then be used fill the holes or if need be, replace wood
- Lower humidity and cooler temperatures make it a great time to paint outside of your home.
- Inspect your roof, or hire a licensed professional to examine your roof for wear and tear.
- Remove garden hoses from outdoor faucets. Leaving hoses attached can cause water to back up in the faucets and in the plumbing pipes just inside your exterior walls.



**"My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference."**

— PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER



### Homeowner's Financial Literacy

Stay tuned for our upcoming homeowner financial literacy program hosted by Habitat for Humanity Board Vice President Rich Kulbacki



#### Tip of the day:

"A recent study shows that the farther away a goal seems, and the less sure we are about when it will happen, the more likely we are to give up. So in addition to focusing on big goals (say, buying a home), aim to also set smaller, short-term goals along the way that will reap quicker results."

### Community Partners

Special thanks to the following groups who have dedicated resources to support our collective community endeavors!

- PNC FOUNDATION
- EMMERSON ELECTRIC
- COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF WESTMORELAND COUNTY
- VERE INC.
- LEEDS
- DOUNUT CONNECTION NEW KENSINGTON
- GIANT EAGLE GETCO VERONA
- STAPLES NEW KENSINGTON
- THERMO TWIN WINDOW COMPANY



### Interested in volunteering?

Come volunteer with us! Whether on the construction home build sites or at our ReStore, we love volunteers that assist us in the achievement of our mission! Come join us today! Visit [www.habitatav.org](http://www.habitatav.org) for more details!



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