

Build him up



BRIANNA BIVENS | THE DAILY TIMES

BILL MUELLER POSES FOR a photo with his family on Saturday, March 30, during a Habitat for Humanity build on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa.

Mueller, 91, recognized for selfless work

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As the walls went up on a Habitat for Humanity home being constructed on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa, for one observer, Bill Mueller, it was as special as if it were his own home.

Mueller, 91, has been on the construction crew for more than 100 Habitat builds in Blount County over the last 25 years. He said he got involved back in 1994 after a couple of friends from First Baptist Maryville told him about their involvement in the very first Habitat build here.

Mueller is a member of Maryville First United Methodist, so when his congregation came onboard with Habitat a short time after First Baptist Maryville, he joined in. The retired mechanical engineer from ALCOA Inc. (now Arconic), hasn't really kept a tally on just how many homes he's helped build, but it's definitely more than 100 of the 160 that have been constructed.

"It never gets old," Mueller said of being onsite at a finished home. "It is fulfilling to everyone who's there. This is a Christian endeavor."

The Bessie Harvey Avenue home will be special in its own right because it is being built by the Maryville First UMC crew in honor of Mueller and all that he has done. Members of his church and family were there on Saturday, March 30, to get things moving and pay tribute to a man who has dedicated thousands of hours to helping complete strangers.

At 91, Mueller is the oldest of the Habitat volunteer team; however, Warren Harris, also a member, is in his 80s and still working.

"He's on my heels," Mueller said. And while Mueller was appreciative of all the attention he received on this build, he would rather be hammering away instead of on the sideline offering his support and expertise. Mueller has health issues and hasn't been able to put hands and feet to the worksite. Sara Gregory was there, a friend of



BILL MUELLER TALKS WITH members of the build crew during a Habitat for Humanity build on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa. He would much prefer to be hammering.



THE CREW RAISES THE first wall of the Habitat for Humanity home on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa.



ROB STEVENSON WORKS ON constructing the walls of the home on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa. It generally takes from three to six months to complete one of the Habitat for Humanity homes. Volunteers are a large part of the process.

Mueller's and member of his Sunday school class at Maryville FUMC. She has also been volunteering with Habitat for many years. The retired registered nurse said she fell in love with carpentry as a young girl, working in

MORE INFORMATION

Blount County Habitat for Humanity is located at 1017 Hampshire Drive, Maryville. For more information on volunteering or applying for the program, call 865-982-8717 or visit the website at www.blounthabitat.org.

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FROM 6A

her father's workshop.

That has rendered her good at hammering and other tasks. If there was anything she didn't know how to do in the jobsite, Mueller has been the best teacher.

"When he teaches you things, you get it," Gregory said. "He does things in a loving way and he's not condescending. He doesn't scream or cuss. He's a very special person."

Because she's been a longtime Habitat volunteer, Gregory has plenty of Bill Mueller stories. He is known for climbing a ladder and then begging witnesses not to tell his daughters.

Habitat partners with local churches, civic organizations and businesses to complete the homes that are built. Then there are people like Mueller and Gregory who make up the full-time crew, working on all of the houses going up. Gregory said at one time, Habitat was building 10 houses per year.

Both of these volunteers urge others to consider taking part. Mueller said, come retirement, we all



BERKLEY MASON AND MIKE Gallegos work on the base of the home on Saturday, March 30 during a Habitat for Humanity build on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa.

need a plan.

"It you sit down, you get too old too fast," he warned.

The rewards of servanthood are worth it, he said. There are hot days in summertime and long days, but the finished product means a family without hope or a home has both.

"Just think of what you are able to do," he said. "You work and watch a

house go from nothing to a finished product. You get to see the joy of the homeowners from making that happen."

It takes anywhere from three to six months to complete a home. Habitat for Humanity's 160th home in Blount County was dedicated earlier in the week. Arconic has donated more land so future builds could be in the works in Alcoa.

Those who work on these homes aren't master carpenters or all experienced in the trade. The first step, Gregory said, is to show up.

"By the end of the day you have done something," she said. "That is the first step. You will have done something tremendous just by showing up."

It is Habitat's mission that all people deserve a



VOLUNTEER SARA GREGORY works on adding supports to raise the wall of the home on Bessie Harvey Avenue in Alcoa. She has been volunteering off and on with Habitat for more than 20 years.

decent place to live. Gregory said she's fortunate in her own situation and thus feels led to do her part.

"I have a mortgage-free house that I live in," she

said. "It's warm in the winter and cool in the summer. I have a bed on which to lay my head at night. My belly's full. So how can I not contribute?"

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