

700 volunteers take on home repairs

35 families benefit from project day

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By MATT BRENNAN For Sun-Times Media

AURORA -- Gilbert Dumbie served his country from 1944 to 1946. Now it is time for the World War II Navy veteran to receive.

Dumbie has live in a home on Warren Avenue on Aurora's near East Side since 1985. The roof leaked in several locations, which caused interior damage to the ceiling. So he applied for a grant as part of Rebuilding Together Aurora's April project and was delighted to be accepted.

"I'm happy, very happy," Dumbie said, above the drone of power tools and bustle of volunteers on Saturday morning.

Dumbie had been awake since 5 a.m. in anticipation of the repairs. He sat in the kitchen wearing a Chicago Bears sweatshirt and a hat that said "The price of freedom is not free" and had several military pins in it.

On the kitchen wall there was a picture of a ship he served on in the Navy. He worked laying anti-torpedo nets, keeping submarines from shooting at ships, he said. After the war, he returned to Illinois, where he worked and raised three children.

There were 35 projects with 700 volunteers taking place Saturday as part of Rebuilding Together Aurora. It is a day when volunteers work on home-repair projects for low-income families, according to Rebuilding Together Aurora Executive Director Emily Stern.

"The ultimate goal is to provide for those who don't have the financial and physical means to do the repairs for themselves with a safer, more comfortable and more accessible home," Stern said.

The organization takes applications for the April event and then determines who they will be able to help. Normally, they receive about 60 applications.

This year, because of the economy and fewer grant opportunities through the city of Aurora, there were about 100, Stern said. They had to whittle that list down to 35 that the group had the funds to complete.

The repairs for Dumbie's home were paid for through a grant that Sears offers to help repair the homes of veterans, Stern said.

Affordable Roofing in Aurora put a new roof on the house on Thursday, while Toyota in Aurora supplied about 25 volunteers for other aspects of the project on Saturday, Stern said.

They made repairs to the interior ceiling and also replaced single-pane windows with more energy-efficient double-pane windows. They were also doing some painting and landscaping, she said.

Rebuilding Together Aurora is part of a national Rebuilding Together effort, which has 200 affiliates nationwide with 3,500 projects and 67,000 volunteers.