

Rebuilding Aurora, one home at a time

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By DENISE LINKE For Sun-Times Media

AURORA -- Patrick Rogers used to spend his days behind a desk, managing computer systems.

But on Wednesday, the retired IT director was standing on a plywood subfloor in an historic home on Kendall Street, installing drywall and laying floor tile in an upstairs bathroom.

"It's fun to actually get your hands in and see the project get done," said Rogers, vice president of Rebuilding Together Aurora and member of the team rehabbing the home of longtime Aurora residents Joe and Hortencia Rangel.

While RTA offers free handyman services to senior citizens, disabled residents and low-income homeowners year-round, it goes all out the last two weeks of April to make major repairs for people who need them most.

This year's April Rebuilding Event, which culminates on Saturday, will spruce up a record 35 homes, said RTA Executive Director Emily Stern.

"We want to help the most vulnerable populations in Aurora," said Stern. "We spend the entire year choosing homes for the April rebuilding."

This year, the RTA received more than 100 applications for major repairs.

The Rangels bought their 1925 Sears kit home more than 35 years ago, soon after Joe Rangel returned from fighting in Vietnam. They worked hard to maintain the property while raising their family, but in recent years health and financial problems have forced them to put off needed repairs, said RTA team member Barbara Polster.

"They're both senior citizens, so they also are starting to have the normal issues that come with aging," Polster said. "They demolished their upstairs bathroom and started to rebuild it years ago, but their health problems got in the way. While they have a bathroom downstairs, it's not safe for them to go down the stairs to reach it in the night, so we decided to rebuild the upstairs bathroom."

The Rangels' RTA team also decided to install a second handrail on the steep staircase, replace the soffits and fascia, replace some antiquated electrical wiring, rebuild the front porch, paint the kitchen, install some new windows -- and even volunteered to reorganize a downstairs room so that Hortencia Rangel can use it as a craft studio.

Work on the house began April 17 and will mostly be finished in time for the unveiling this Saturday, Rogers said. For many RTA volunteers, the main draw is getting to know the homeowners they're helping.

"Joe and Hortencia are two of the nicest people I've ever met," Polster said. "It's truly a pleasure to do this for them."