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Monroe Retired and Senior Volunteer Program needs volunteers of all ages

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Mike Walsh, left, and Chad Rarick, both of Stroudsburg, volunteer their time to build a ramp at a home in Hamilton Township on Friday afternoon.

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Adam Richins/Pocono Record

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By **Andrew Scott**
Pocono Record Writer
August 24, 2010

Limited mobility has made Monroe County's elderly and physically challenged residents who live alone virtual prisoners in their own homes because they can't get up and down steps.

That's why the Monroe County Retired and Senior Volunteer Program needs more volunteers to help build ramps at the homes of these residents.

"Elderly people who live on their own fall and get hurt trying to get up or down steps in their homes," RSVP volunteer Chuck Edwards said. "That's what happened to my dad.

"And as baby-boomers like myself get older, more of us will be in the same situation," said Edwards, a retired engineer who worked with Habitat For Humanity in Vermont. "We want to stay independent and stay in our own homes, but many of our houses aren't made for those with limited mobility.

"And since the Poconos has a significant baby-boomer population, I can definitely see an increase in the need for more ramps down the road," he added.

Edwards and other volunteers build ramps both inside and outside the homes of residents with limited mobility.

"Two years ago, we built a ramp for a wonderful 85-year-old Latvian woman who had managed to escape imprisonment by the Nazis, only to find herself literally imprisoned 50 years later in her daughter's home in Mount Pocono," he said.

If the residents have younger relatives living in the area, those relatives are contacted and invited to help build the ramps, especially on days when there's a shortage of available volunteers.

"The more people we have involved, the quicker the ramps can get built," Edwards said.

Most residents with limited mobility cannot afford to pay for the materials needed to build the ramps. In such cases, the RSVP has relied on funding through its umbrella agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service in Washington D.C.

"But, it's harder to get funding with the economy the way it is now," said Norma Fagan, director of the RSVP's Monroe County office in Stroudsburg. "So, we try to fundraise and we accept community donations."

Residents like Verlo Schupp, 88, of Hamilton Township, would like to see RSVP be able to continue building ramps. Edwards and other volunteers are building an outdoor ramp at her trailer home.

"It's a fantastic thing they're doing," Schupp said recently, watching volunteers hammer and drill in boards. "I had three steps I had trouble getting up and down. Now that they're doing this for me, all my friends my age can come visit me."

Edwards said, "The steps she had were 30 inches in elevation. That might not seem like much to us younger folks. But, to someone in their 80s or 90s, it seems like the Grand Canyon."

And it's not just building ramps. RSVP has volunteers who do other home minor improvements and repairs.

"We could always use more volunteers to do things like cleaning up lawns and cleaning out basements," said David Struthwolf, who coordinates the RSVP's home minor-improvement efforts. "It's a great opportunity for people to use what God gave them to help others. Your greatest satisfaction is the smiles you get from those you've helped. A lot of us volunteers are over 55, but we're always looking for younger people to sign up."

And again, home improvement is just part of what's available for volunteers do.

Founded in 1971, the RSVP has more than 750 offices nationwide, 29 of which are in Pennsylvania. The Monroe County office, which will celebrate its 20th year in existence with an Oct. 7 event at Split Rock Resort, oversees more than 2,000 volunteers, Fagan said.

"We supply volunteers to over 180 nonprofit groups and agencies, including Headstart, Meals on Wheels, the Red Cross and the Agency on Aging," Fagan said. "We just ask that these nonprofits show the volunteers the same respect they do their paid staff."

RSVP's Stroudsburg office number is 570-420-3747, with a Tobyhanna satellite office number at 570-894-9300.

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grampy

Until i moved, i was active in "RSVP". You meet some great people, like some of the vets i drove to the VA in Wilkes Barre. Wow, the stories they told!
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Goosey Lucy

There are a plethora of "Well To Do" people, businesses and others living in the Pocono mtn. Areas. THEY NEED to step up and GIVE back just a tiny bit of their wealth that was made from the consumer of various products and services as well as volunteer time or supplies. Let's say Wally World for instance. What do they do to help Elders here other than take their money when theyshop in that store? I don't know who does the right thing and who doesn't. I know that people who can least afford to donate time and money are the ones who step up to the plate. And I know all to well how bad times are, we are in the swirl of this disasterous job situation here in the Poconos. Find ing work is bad enough, but have to deal with Age Discrimination is a disgace and immoral battle we should NOT be tolerating.
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