

Building Freedom One Ramp at a Time

Vol. 1 Issue 4

News

SAWs Indy celebrated “Indy Do Day” by partnering with Pro(ACT) Community Partnerships. Pro(ACT) is a 501c3 service-learning organization that aims to Connect Youth and Professional Groups to Community Service Opportunities in the city of Indianapolis.

Support for SAWs is now possible through AmazonSmile, Amazon’s charitable program. Please remember as you shop for the holidays any purchase made on Amazon indicating SAWs as your choice of charity to support will result in a 0.5% donation to SAWs.

Shiloh United Methodist Church in Jasper, IN, builds its first ramp in Pike County.

The Three Nails Project in Vincennes, IN, is joining the SAWs effort in Southern Indiana.

The Evansville Construction Group just celebrated its 4th anniversary with the SAWs mission.

The Greencastle Presbyterian Church SAWs group just celebrated its 6th anniversary in September during which they have built more than 100 ramps.



18 Foster Children and 1 Miracle

By Dan Carpenter

Donna Weimer has been a foster parent to 18 handicapped children over the years, and there was one three-year-old she was determined to adopt.

Forget it, the doctors told her. Beverly wouldn’t reach age 5. Brain-damaged by injuries before her fifth day of life, she was best left to institutional care for the short time she’d been allotted.

“They said ‘Don’t get attached, she’s not going to make it.’ They said she would never walk or talk or ever call me Mommy,” Donna says 39 years later.

Her daughter endures multiple health problems. She needs a heroic amount of care. She also is witty, vivacious, kind, courageous, a movie buff, a wizard at jigsaw puzzles, and by her mother’s description, “the star of the family” that includes eight grown siblings.

“She’s been a blessing,” Donna says. “We thank God for her every day.”

As it happens, “Blessing” is the same word she uses for the band of volunteers from SAWs who stopped by in September to build a multi-level ramp at the rear of the Weimers’ Southside house, ending a daily ordeal of coming and going.

Cerebral palsy inflicted in infancy has left Beverly with lifelong balance difficulties and impaired vision. The front and back stoops of the home were not hospitable to her wheelchair, and her parents – Donna, 68, and Chuck, 77 – have disabilities of their own that doctors say will have them both in need of wheelchairs down the road. Living on modest pensions, but caught in the no-man’s-land just above

SAWs (Servants At Work, Inc.) is a non-profit 501(c)(3), all volunteer ministry established in 2003 that builds wheelchair ramps to provide the elderly and persons with disabilities access to their world, allowing them to remain in their homes.

“I didn’t want to do those steps any more.”

eligibility for Medicaid, they have been “eaten up,” as Donna puts it, by medical bills from Beverly’s CP, diabetes, heart problems, seizures and injuries.

Nevertheless, the Weimers hesitated when a relative mentioned **SAWs**. They thought others might be more deserving. The organization found the family most deserving when Donna finally made the contact, and the result was a handsome two-directional ramp of about 20 feet in length.

“They did a great job,” Chuck Weimer said as Donna eased Beverly down the structure a few days after installation.

“And they were so sweet,” Donna exclaimed. “We’d just been praying for this.”

For Beverly, the breakthrough came not a moment too soon: “I didn’t want to do those steps any more.”

To Jim Burleson, project manager for the crew that placed the Weimers’ ramp, the appreciation is mutual. And the

work is, well, fun.

“I always equate it to going out with the guys on a Saturday morning to play golf, except instead of playing golf you’re doing some good,” he says. “The payday is when that client takes the first ride down the ramp, the joy on their face – and the caregiver too, who’s been muscling that chair up and down steps all that time.”

Burleson’s crew performed the third and fifth parts of a five-part process: interviewing a household to determine need and financial eligibility; surveying to determine placement and obstructions, such as gas lines; gathering materials; prefabricating components, and assembly.

A registered nurse in the Community Hospital system in his day job, Burleson has been volunteering with **SAWs** 10 years and works on 20 to 25 jobs a year. **SAWs** is on track to exceed its record of 115 ramps this year in the metro Indianapolis area, according to Jim Hamilton, project coordinator for the area.

They’ll never meet a more grateful recipient than the Weimers, who’ve spent their lives being grateful for the opportunity to love and serve young people in need.

“I’m selfish,” Donna Weimer says of her focus on foster-parenting the disabled. “I wanted the ones who could give me the most.”

She does not mean money. There was very little of that from the government. “I always dressed them as well as my own kids. I wanted them to be equal to everyone. I wanted them to feel good about themselves.”

As for Bev, Donna says, “God knew we were going to be a mess, so he sent her to keep us in line. And she has done that. She’s a miracle.”

A pretty fine “mess” her family is, if you ask the men who came to help.

“She is more of a giver,” Jim Burleson says of Donna Weimer. “So it’s good that she can be on the other side of the fence.”

Letter from the President

Another Year, New Milestones



Congratulations to the **SAWs** Indianapolis Construction Group! Last month they surpassed 500 total ramps built in the Indianapolis metro area since 2003. While there is a “core” group of volunteers that can be counted on week after week, **SAWs** has more than 200 volunteers on the roster that build occasionally. Having said that, more volunteers are needed as the demand for **SAWs** ramps continues to increase. The Indy group thought they would fall short of its record of 115 ramps last year...now, I’m not so sure.

This year **SAWs** added more construction groups across Indiana in South Bend, Elkhart, Plymouth, Logansport, Muncie and Connersville. Volunteers Pete Mohr and Jim Burleson have been instrumental in training and overseeing these new groups as they grow and organize. These construction groups have completed 20 ramps since their inception earlier this year.

We formed a new Donor Relations Team this year and they are busy submitting grant applications to every county community foundation (there is one in almost all 92

Indiana counties).

At the same time our faithful Grant Writer, Jim Gilster, continues to focus on Marion County and grants to keep that potent engine fueled. If there are foundations or funds to which **SAWs** should apply, please let us know.

As our building season approaches its end, I want to thank each and every volunteer that has driven a screw, cut a board, shoveled dirt, made a phone call, surveyed a site, drawn a plan, or raised a dollar. YOU make this possible! YOU are responsible for giving those who call on us their freedom back. THANK YOU!

God bless,
Rik Hagarty



Photo above: Servants for Christ Lutheran Church SAWs team, Indianapolis IN