

Ramps for freedom

Financial support available for those needing wheelchair ramps

By Melanie Aves

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Holland, MI — Holland resident Randy Wedeven has battled multiple sclerosis for about 10 years. He recently received a boost in his independence in the form of a wheelchair ramp.

"It's another step toward freedom," said Wedeven. "Without the ramp I wouldn't be taking walks with my wife and granddaughter. The ramp allows me to get out and participate in life."

Wedeven's family and friends assisted in building the ramp for him.

If you, or someone you know, is wheelchair bound and would benefit from having a ramp for safe access, financial support is available.

To apply for a ramp
Contact: Faith Avery
Disability Network/Lakeshore
426 Century Lane
Phone: (616) 396-5326
Web site: dnlakeshore.org

The Disability Network/Lakeshore oversees a collaborative effort by several lakeshore nonprofit agencies along with the city of Holland to create a program to provide home access ramps to low-income persons with disabilities. These individuals often need home modifications, including ramps, to maintain their quality of life and live independently. Although the demand for ramps is growing in today's tough economic climate, getting one in place can be a financial challenge to many.

By pooling resources from the city of Holland's Community Development Fund, His Harvest Stand, Senior Resources, Evergreen Commons, and the Ottawa County Department of Human Services, funds for ramps are available to those in need. Applications are reviewed by a committee composed of representatives of these organizations. Once an applicant is approved, funding is granted for the materials needed for the ramp or for the labor, and, in some cases, for both. Applicants must be persons with disabilities, senior citizens or parents or guardians of persons with disabilities who can demonstrate financial need.

Mark Wolfe, home repair director at His Harvest Stand in Zeeland, has worked on building ramps as a volunteer for the past three years. He said most ramps can be built in one eight- to 12-hour day.

"We primarily use treated lumber," he said, "and sometimes it is donated."

Wolfe said AMBUCs, a nonprofit group for people with disabilities, will help obtain materials when necessary.

He said if a family no longer needs a ramp, the same volunteer team will take it down and reinstall it somewhere else where there is a need.

All of the ramp installations have been worthy projects, Wolfe said.

"People are really delighted with them," he said. "We've met people who have been carrying a disabled older parent up and down stairs, and people who have simply stopped going out at all."

"We want to get the word out, so people will apply for our ramps," said Faith Avery, information and referral specialist for the Disability Network. "We want to help those in need so that they can live comfortably. This is the best time of year to construct ramps."

Avery, who heads the ramp project for the Disability Network, is also looking for volunteers who would like to work on ramp construction and for churches who can refer persons in need to the service, as well as provide follow-up support for disabled persons and their families.

For more information about the network, or to volunteer, contact Avery at Disability Network/Lakeshore, 426 Century Lane, or call (616) 396-5326.