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NORTHJERSEY.COM : NEWS

Volunteers with Habitat for Humanity repair lingering Sandy damage in Little Ferry

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BY KIM LUEDDEKE

STAFF WRITER | THE RECORD

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CHRIS PEDOTA/THE RECORD

Volunteers help Chris Warburton of Hackensack, supervisor of volunteers for Habitat for Humanity hang wallboard as part of finishing work on a basement that was flooded during Superstorm Sandy.

LITTLE FERRY – When the Hackensack River, propelled by Superstorm Sandy, surged over its flood controls and into the streets of Little Ferry and Moonachie, the force of the water shattered Bill Kostroun’s basement window. What had been trickles of water seeping in quickly turned into a torrent, filling the basement to the ceiling.

A freelance photographer, Kostroun said he lost slides, negatives and photography equipment, as well as a furnace, a hot-water heater, a well-water pump, furniture and tools.

But unlike many of his neighbors, the water never reached his first floor, a small blessing Kostroun is grateful for.

“I lucked out that way,” said Kostroun.

Kostroun got another piece of luck Saturday, when a crew descended on his Werneking Place home to install drywall in his damaged basement.

“It’s a great help,” said Kostroun.

The crew of 10, volunteers from United Water’s Women’s Leadership Network, was participating in Habitat for Humanity’s National Women Build Week, a program intended to encourage more female



CHRIS PEDOTA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chris Warburton, supervisor of volunteers for Habitat for Humanity and resident of Hackensack, shows Jo Ann Berenguer, an employee of United Water and resident of Clifton, how to cut sheetrock as part of finishing a basement that was flooded during Superstorm Sandy.

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participation in the construction field and to highlight the challenges to homeownership faced by women. A second crew comprising Lowe's employees put up drywall Saturday at a Fairview home that was also damaged during Sandy.

Habitat for Humanity has fixed over 50 Sandy-impacted homes in Little Ferry and the surrounding area in the past two years, said the group's volunteer director, Angela King.

Sandy made landfall in New Jersey on Oct. 29, 2012, and was the largest hurricane on record in the Atlantic Ocean. It killed 37 people statewide, including one person in Bergen County; swept away miles of beaches; severely damaged thousands of homes and businesses; and left 7 million state residents without power, some for up to two weeks.

Though much of the attention has been on the Jersey Shore, many people in North Jersey were also affected by the storm, especially in the low-lying towns of Little Ferry and Moonachie.

Among those hit hard were Kostroun's neighbors, Rosemarie and Joe Olivelli.

Five and a half feet of water swept through the couple's Poplar Avenue home, destroying everything in its wake and drowning a pet parrot they couldn't rescue in time. The power was out for two weeks, forcing the couple to buy an \$1,100 generator to run a special machine for Joe, who suffers from sleep apnea. Mold and mildew flourished in their crawl space, and Rosemarie – a severe asthmatic – says her condition has gotten dramatically worse since Sandy.

The couple, who are in their 60s, did not have flood insurance and received just \$499 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said Rosemarie. They wiped out their savings and have had to borrow money from loved ones, she said.

But after a chance encounter with a Habitat for Humanity crew working in the neighborhood, Rosemarie Olivelli says the group replaced their air conditioners, gave them a generator that automatically turns on when the power goes out, fixed the stairs to their second floor, and repaired their deck, which had been pulled away from the house by the flood. They also got rid of the mold and mildew, Rosemarie said.

"The volunteers and the workers, the craftsmanship, the help, the compassion – It's phenomenal," said Rosemarie. "I don't know what we would have done without them."

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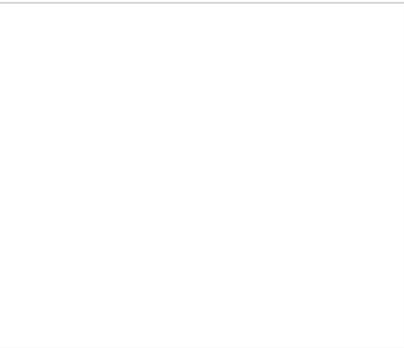
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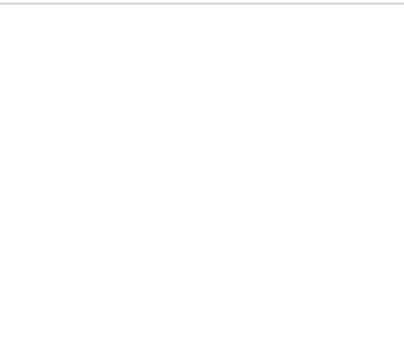


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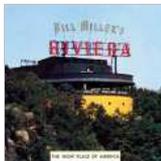
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