

# Habitat

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asked the Architectural Mailboxes team to shift their attention to a new initiative, A Brush With Kindness, which offers low-income homeowners free exterior home improvements, including exterior painting, landscaping and making minor repairs. The program "helps restore neighborhoods," explained outreach coordinator Alison Mullin. "A Brush With Kindness is a way to make a big difference with small acts of kindness...revitalizing and unifying communities."

Denise Hill, a divorced grandmother who works part-time as an office clerk for L.A. Unified School District, struggled for years to maintain her three-bedroom house in South Los Angeles, where she has lived over 23 years. The needed repairs were cost-prohibitive. In addition, Hill suffers seizures, which further limits the work she can do. Local help agencies "have lots of programs for senior citizens," she lamented, "but not for people in-between like me." As a result, Hill said her house looked "crummy."

Enter the Habitat volunteers, who were repairing a neighbor's house but ran to her aid when they saw Hill lapse into a seizure. "They called the paramedics; they stayed with me," said Hill. "Those members went the whole nine yards."

After learning more about Hill's predicament, some of the volunteers encouraged her to apply to the repair program. Shortly thereafter, about 20 A Brush With Kindness volunteers showed up on her doorstep and asked where to begin. "I just love them," Hill said of the volunteers. "They became family. We laughed, we ate together. They were so sweet...and they did more than I ever thought they would. I feel so surprised and blessed."

Mullin says Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles is looking for additional volunteers from anywhere in the South Bay to work with A Brush With Kindness, particularly through the holiday months. "For homeowners who may be struggling, the upkeep of their homes usually falls to the

wayside," said Mullin, and "the holidays add additional financial pressure."

A Brush With Kindness will give families looking for a meaningful way to spend some of the festive season together or companies, like Architectural Mailboxes, that want to "give back" to their community, a unique chance to "meet and connect" with neighbors and other volunteers, work alongside homeowners themselves, "get their hands dirty and pick up a few tricks of the trade along the way," she said.

Troyer, whose mother taught her the importance of helping others, believes volunteering with Habitat for Humanity has helped her employees "see the rewards," in helping those in need. That's especially true for those on her staff "not necessarily raised to put others first," she said. When she considers how fortunate she and those around her are "in this economy, to be employed, to be in business," Troyer said she can't help wanting to give a boost to others. Her Compton-based company, she emphasized, "supports that type of behavior."

Farentinos, in turn, credits Troyer for his altruistic focus. "I have no shortage of ideas," he said, but it was his wife's ability to lead and organize his dreams into definite plans of action that gave him the impetus to follow a more service-based life.

"Once you do make an effort to help others, it all has to do with the wonderful feeling you get as you're doing it," he said. Added Troyer: "You'd have to be with a sub-zero heart, not to feel the gratitude that comes back to you."

As for Hill, the grandmother from South L.A., "now, every time I pass by my home, and pass by it again and I grin from ear to ear because it's mine," she said. "My house is gorgeous!"

To volunteer with A Brush With Kindness or recommend a homeowner who needs repairs, visit the Habitat for Humanity's Greater Los Angeles website at <http://www.habitatla.org/abwk.asp> or call (310) 323-4663.



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