

Pleasant weather may have been the biggest blessing on Saturday, April 29, as hundreds of volunteers from many local organizations and churches were dispatched throughout Calvert County to perform repair work at various homes for the county's annual Christmas in April project.

Christmas in April is a non-profit organization that selects up to 25 homes — which require minor to major repairs — owned by low-income families, elderly citizens or families with children. Each home is assigned a crew of about 13 people, who use materials mostly donated by local businesses to perform the home repairs or improvements. The work is performed each year on the last Saturday in April.

The home of Mary Mason, 70, on Broomes Island Road in Port Republic was one of the many sites where volunteers toiled to make improvements. The crew at Mason's home, mostly made up of members of the Calvert Kiwanis Club, built a handicapped-accessible ramp to the front of her home, an improvement her daughter Ruth Waul said was much needed.

"It's been killing me trying to get her up the steps and down the steps for her [doctor's] appointments," Waul said, noting that her mother suffers from several health problems, which includes the need for her mother to go for kidney dialysis three times a week. "That [ramp] will make things so much easier."

Waul, who lives next door to her mother, said the crew showed up promptly around 7:30 a.m. and went right to work.

But the Christmas in April crew were not the only ones putting their backs into the work. Waul's husband, Timothy Waul, and her son, Keith Broome, assisted the crews by cleaning up a Dumpster full of debris that had piled up behind the homes. Broome was making short work of what could have been a day-long project by operating a backhoe, scooping up broken branches and old lumber and lifting it into the Dumpster, provided by Christmas in April.

In addition to the clearing of debris and the handicapped-accessible ramp, other projects around the house included some plumbing work in the kitchen and bathroom, repairing a piece of siding, placing a new front door on the home and clearing out a crawlspace.

George Leah, the house captain at Mason's home and also project manager for school construction for Calvert County Public Schools, said he had been working with Christmas in April through the Kiwanis Club for 14 years now. This year was the third time his crew had been at the site on Broomes Island Road.

"Several years ago we built a ramp up to the back of [Waul's home], and about four years ago, we painted the inside of Ms. Mason's home and built a back porch."

Leah said Mason could not have been happier or more grateful for the improvements.

"She's got a lot of spirit," he said. "She's a little cutie, she's all excited. And the family has really helped out with clearing all of the debris from behind the home ... that backhoe is a real help."

Waul said she had heard about the Christmas in April program during her time as a volunteer at other organizations in Calvert. She said she has worked in the past with Project ECHO, the homeless shelter in Prince Frederick, as a volunteer coordinator with the Archdiocese of Washington, the Angel Watch Shelter in Hughesville and with the United Way's Day of Caring event each year. And she is considering adding another organization to her resume.

"I'm thinking about doing this [Christmas in April] next year at another home as a volunteer," Waul said.

Meanwhile up north in Owings, a crew formed mostly of members of the Calvert Lions Club was hard at work on a home on Clyde Jones Road.

The work at the home, owned by Patrice Jones and G. Gross, included replacing the entire living room floor and covering it with vinyl flooring. The crew, headed by Dan Yoder, realigned and painted the front door, and installed a new back door and storm door.

“We may come back and do more work,” Yoder said.

“This is one of the best crews I’ve had. As you can see, nobody is standing around, but sometimes we can’t get everything done in one day.”

The crew took a momentary break from working when Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.5th) arrived to present Christmas in April President Michael Hederman with a check for \$3,000. Hoyer, dressed down in a blue shirt and jeans, had visited four other Christmas in April homes in his district, presenting checks totaling \$15,000 from the Fannie Mae Foundation to help support the Rebuilding Together/Christmas in April chapters in his election district.

“Everyone is doing a great job,” Hoyer told the volunteers. “It’s you, the volunteers, that keep programs like this going.”

Hederman said crews around the county were doing great work, despite a mishap Friday afternoon at a house on Willows Road.

Hederman said the crews were out to start working on the roof at the home when the roof collapsed.

“The home was built wrong. It had a cathedral ceiling and it started to collapse yesterday,” Hederman said. “But, it’s up in the air again and the volunteers are doing fine.” No one was injured.

Hederman said 24 homes were receiving assistance this year, as well as two other residences that needed septic work. He commented on the clear skies and warm weather this year, noting that last year many crews were out working in the pouring rain.

“We had to cancel a few roofing jobs that day, but the volunteers went out later in the week and got the job done,” he said.

Hederman said Christmas in April takes nearly a year’s worth of planning leading up to the final Saturday in April. He said the organization will start planning for next year in May. Christmas in April will receive home recommendations from families, churches or other organizations for next year in October.

The organization will review the applicants and select 25 homes in November. Volunteers will begin visiting the homes in December and assess what needs to be done.