



Texas Ramp Project Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 1

January 2021

Dear Friends,

This year has been a momentous one for all of us! We have now provided more than 20,000 elderly and disabled Texans with safe access and reached another milestone by completing 100 miles of ramps in total. Bravo to all of you who have helped the TRP reach these targets and assist all of those clients you have served so admirably.

Having said that, we must also reflect on the fact that our service level is about 40%, meaning that 60% of the referrals flowing into our database are not addressed. There is no negative here, but rather an admission that we have tapped into a hugely underserved need that continues to grow as baby boomers age out and our society looks a bit “grayer” day by day.

To help anyone, three things need to come together: volunteers, leadership and funding. Without one of these the other two lose their value. The easiest one is raw volunteers, next is money, and the toughest is skilled leadership. We can be more successful in the fundraising by demonstrating more builds. Money flows to successful efforts such as ours.

In 2021, I would like to see us do more “blitz builds,” which are days when we build a large number of ramps in one area. If we do the pre-publicity correctly, we should uncover new partners in the area of the blitz. I propose we do four of these in 2021. I will commit to joining each blitz and try to generate some additional awareness for your efforts.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating. We need to keep COVID-19 in mind, so it may well be that these come later in the year, when a vaccine is available to all. A blitz can help us reach corporate sponsors that we have lost to the pandemic.

In closing I would like to thank each of you for being such dedicated volunteers this year and wish you all the best in the coming year.

John Laine,
Executive Director

IMPORTANT REMINDER as We Close Out 2020

Please remember that we need all 2020 expense receipts and donations by January 15, 2021. Our auditors require that all expenses and income be booked in the proper year before the accounting books can be closed at the end of January.

- Send credit card receipts by email to Marge Oberg (maoberg45@gmail.com).
- Send expense receipts for reimbursement to Donna Burton (texasrampstreasurer@gmail.com) or mail to 7702 Turnberry Lane, Dallas, TX 75248.
- Send checks for deposit to Texas Ramp Project, P.O. Box 832065, Richardson, TX 75083-2065.

If you are holding year-end inventory, please send your completed inventory form to Donna Burton at the above address by January 15. You should have received instructions and the form in mid-December. For questions, please contact Donna at texasrampstreasurer@gmail.com.

Thanks so much for your help as we close out 2020.

100th Mile Celebration Goes the Distance

The Texas Ramp Project's "100 Miles of Freedom" celebration has come and gone, but the savor of success lingers on. During November and December, despite a pandemic that grew more threatening every day, TRP volunteers built over 260 ramps in nearly every region.

Efforts to publicize this milestone were also successful. Press kits were sent to the media on four different occasions. Press releases were sent to our "100 Miles" sponsors, our partnering foundations, and all Texas Area Agencies on Aging. Templates for local press releases were sent to volunteer leaders in the field, who contacted their local media. These efforts resulted in nearly 30 TV interviews and newspaper articles. Posts to Facebook and Instagram surged.

Bottom line is that our work got more attention in two months than in any time in our 14 years of existence. Excitement is high that this is the way we get more volunteers, increase referrals, and interest donors. We hope that now that we are attuned to how to do it, we will continue to keep a higher profile. This is how we will grow.

We are especially grateful to Kari Daelke, who designed the "100 Miles of Freedom" logo, T-shirts, and all the other publicity materials you received. Her company, Alphagraphics, shipped the shirts and masks at their expense. Thanks also go to Gary Gatzlaff for fielding inquiries and serving as a clearinghouse for photos and articles arising from the campaign.

Thanks go to the 100th Mile committee, which included Sandy Knutson, chair, along with Brock Bayles, Kay Champagne, Kari Daelke, Gary Gatzlaff, Molli Harris, John Laine and Garner McNett. Vince Bray of Toyota provided valuable assistance with the

media campaign. And special thanks to all of you for building ramps and helping us tell our story to the world.

Thank You, “100 Miles” Sponsors!

The Texas Ramp Project offers a hearty thank you to the five sponsors of our “100 Miles of Freedom” campaign. They are:

- St. David’s Foundation, Austin
- State Farm, Richardson
- Toyota Motor North America, Inc., Plano
- H-E-B, San Antonio
- Alphagraphics Stemmons Corridor, Dallas



A Special Thank You

Despite all the obstacles, you, the volunteers, have accomplished a record feat by building over 100 miles of ramps and now, over 20,000 ramps. You and your volunteer work have been the subject of many news stories and reports in 2020. You have sent many pictures and story lines to me for posting on social media. The response has been marvelous, to say the least.

I have tried to forward the comments of “thanks” to teams. If you have not already done so, go to TRP’s Facebook page and read the comments on the posts.

Do keep the photos and videos coming in to keep our story growing so we can be there for so many more. My thanks to all of you.

Gary Gatzlaff, Board Member

Grants Received in December

The St. David’s Foundation of Austin has once again approved a \$90,000 grant for ramp construction in Austin Central and South in 2021. St. David’s has supported the Texas Ramp Project as a highly valued partner since inception, and their community relations professionals also assisted with publicity in the Austin area during our “100 Miles of Freedom” campaign.

Other grants received in December include the following:

- Mary E. Bivins Foundation, \$15,000, Amarillo
- Community Foundation of Abilene through the support of Beltway Park Church, \$15,000
- Carl B. & Florence E. King Foundation, \$15,000, Tarrant and Denton counties
- C.J. & Syble Fowlston Charitable Trust, \$10,000, Amarillo

- Bernard & Audre Rapoport Foundation, \$10,000, Waco South
- Clara Blackford Smith & W. Aubrey Smith Charitable Foundation, \$10,000, Texoma
- Gibson Energy, \$5,000, Permian Basin
- Toyota USA, \$5,000, “100 Miles of Freedom” campaign

We are so grateful for the generosity of these foundations and donors. We could not do it without their support.

Texas Ramp Project: Your Build Pictures Tell our Story

By Madison Lopez, SMU Board Fellow

As the year 2020 comes to a close, many words can be said to describe this rather unusual year. While the descriptive words chosen may differ from person to person, perhaps a mixture of both good and bad, many would agree that the year 2020 brought us even closer to technology than we were before. As some are even calling 2020 “The Year of Zoom” for many people’s new forced familiarity with the online video calling service, we see especially in 2020 how technology has changed the way we communicate, interact, and learn new information.

For the Texas Ramp Project, this could not be a truer statement. As an organization, we leapt into both new and old social media platforms alike, sharing more content with volunteers and organizations than ever before and gaining the opportunity to spread the word of all the incredible work TRP volunteers do.

Perhaps highlighting TRP’s adventure into digital marketing and its growing social media presence best was that of the successful social media campaign that accompanied the “100 Miles of Freedom” celebration. First, watch our quick recap of the month-long celebration [HERE](#). Because of the exciting photos from builds around the state and press garnered from media outlets, our name and work was shared across the state of Texas by thousands. Here are a few of the exciting social media stats:

Instagram: Followers grew by nearly 10% compared to the previous month. Content interactions increased by 2,040% compared to the previous month. More stories tagged TRP than ever before in one month.

Facebook: Page views grew by 20% compared to the previous month. Posts reached nearly 5,000 individuals. Post engagement increased by 40% compared to the previous month.

Keep sharing your fun TRP pictures, so our newly found social media momentum continues to grow in 2021. Tell your friends to follow us on social media here:

Instagram:	Facebook:	Twitter:	LinkedIn:
@tx_ramp_project	Facebook.com/texasramps	@TexasRamps	Texas Ramp Project

YMSL Cedar Park Chapter Has ‘Ultimate Gift’ for Texas Ramp Project

The Young Men’s Service League chapter of Cedar Park, Texas, teamed with the Travis County and Williamson County/North Austin Texas Ramp Projects for an “Ultimate Gift” service project. On November 7 and 14, YMSL Cedar Park built four ramps with volunteers of the two local Ramp Projects.

YMSL Cedar Park has been active with TRP in 2020. But the Ultimate Gift was intended to be impactful and transformative and involve as many YMSL members in the chapter as possible. Over 200 YMSL moms and boys participated in the builds at different stages on these two days and in the prep for the builds.

To keep the numbers at each build site low yet maintain high participation levels, different crews were assigned various times, with some overlap for smooth transition between build teams. YMSL Cedar Park has really taken to these projects as they are outdoors, are fun, and offer a good sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.

YMSL members work with the Texas Ramp Project in several regions, including Austin and Dallas/Fort Worth. During the pandemic, corporate workdays—a reliable source of construction crews—have been canceled. In addition, many Texas Ramp Project regulars have suspended participation because they are retired adults, some with preexisting conditions.



YMSL members have proved a reliable resource during these trying times. The boys and their moms work often enough that they are familiar with ramp construction. There is always a trained, experienced TRP volunteer on hand to operate the saw and oversee operations.



There are YMSL chapters in Austin, College Station, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Waco. If you are looking for dependable volunteers in any of these regions, visit the YMSL website at ymsl.org/find-a-chapter.

Unsung Hero: TRP Board Member Vanessa Baker



Eight years ago, as the Texas Ramp Project was approaching 1,000 builds per year, the board saw the need to switch from spreadsheet recordkeeping to a much more robust Salesforce database. Throughout the year Steve Adams, a board member at the time, shepherded the new database through the development and data transfer phase. But he was retiring at the end of the year.

Just as board members were beginning to panic about who would manage the database, a call came from a woman in Forney. She was looking for a volunteer position. She had just helped build a ramp for a friend's grandmother and came looking for us. By some strange—board members believe heaven-sent—coincidence, she happened to be a computer whiz.

That's how Vanessa Baker came on board, at the exact moment TRP needed her. She became our database administrator and has served in that capacity for the past seven years. She also assists with posts on Facebook. She has a degree in computer science from Stephen F. Austin State University and has been a SQL programmer for 18 years. She works from home for a California company.

Vanessa's mettle was sorely tested over the past few months as some glitches were introduced into the database. Some regional reporting was being scrambled, and county designations for November and December referrals were being deleted. Vanessa worked hours each day for weeks to find the glitches and get them repaired. We're happy to say the database has been restored.

Vanessa has always valued volunteer work. Prior to joining up with TRP, she spent 11 years with DFW Pug Rescue, serving on the board of directors. She still likes to build ramps with the Dallas crew. Her friend of the past four years, Barry Ferrill, has also become a ramp builder. The ramps are especially important to Barry because his brother became a quadriplegic at age 26 in a diving accident.

Besides working and volunteering, Vanessa is building a house on 13 acres in East Texas and manages a side craft business. She and Barry also enjoy traveling, with hopes of visiting Tahiti and Australia when it's safe to travel again.

In a recent Facebook post, Vanessa wrote, "This my favorite organization to donate my time and resources to, because not only has one person's life changed, the lives of the family, community and medical team who support our client in and around his home have also been made a little easier. All across the State of Texas...it is simply neighbors helping neighbors."

Ramp of the Month: 20,000th Ramp Built in Hill County

The suspense is over. The 20,000th ramp was built in Itasca, Texas, in Hill County, on December 5, 2020. The 38-foot ramp was built for 67-year-old Verna Sue C., who uses a walker for mobility. The four steps to the ground made it risky for Mrs. C. to leave home without assistance. Her husband also has a mobility issue.



The eight volunteers, from White Bluff Chapel and King Memorial United Methodist Church in Whitney, spent about four hours at the site on a sunny Saturday morning. This was the second milestone this year for the Hill County group. Earlier this year they built their 100th ramp near Peoria. The 20,000th ramp clients were referred by Encompass Home Health.

About his involvement with the local Ramp Project, Hill County team leader Ron Williams says, "It's always a blessing to those we build for, and for ourselves as well."

We went by Mrs. C.'s house the other day to paint the ramp, and she was just bubbly. She was so thankful for it."

Funding for ramps in Hill County come from the George G. and Alva Hudson Smith Foundation, Dorothy Gaines Foundation, HILCO Electric Trust, Exxon Mobil, and Heart of Texas Area Agency on Aging. The Hill County team built 22 ramps in 2020.



Is There No End to Her Talents?

Kay Geurin, area coordinator for Hayes, Caldwell, Comal and Guadalupe counties, takes a break to ski in Ruidoso after traveling to Mexico to hand out food packages and Christmas toys. Way to live and give, Kay. TRP volunteers are the best!

DO: Please Pass the Newsletter On

We hope you enjoy having the newsletter sent to you directly, as it is filled with useful information, building hints and tips, data collection updates and processes, client stories, special announcements and recognitions.

The newsletter only does its job when it is dispersed and shared with all who might be interested. We encourage you to liberally pass it on to others in your region. Also, do send email addresses of people in your region who should be receiving it, along with their name and TRP region, to Sandy Knutson at sjkbits@aol.com.

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