

Mount Pleasant Tribune

## Changing lives, one ramp at a time across Northeast Texas

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Volunteers with the Texas Ramp Project, Titus County branch pose on a finished ramp.

Photos Courtesy of Texas Ramp Project of Titus County

When you're able to walk on your own two feet, you may not give much thought to how vital a ramp might be for others. But the volunteers for the Texas Ramp Project of Titus County have seen firsthand how the ramps they build for people have changed lives and brought tears of joy.

Tom Nuchols and Jerry and Mary Hearron are the three leading volunteers of the Titus County branch for the Texas Ramp Project (TRP). It's a statewide initiative that began in 1985, when members of the Kiwanis Club in Richardson, Texas were asked to build a wheelchair ramp for a friend. This resulted in the Dallas Ramp Project and development of a system for providing wheelchair ramps to low-income people with disabilities in Dallas County, all for free. In 2006, the TRP expanded to 145 Texas Counties.

Closer to home, Tom tells us he is a founding member of the Titus County branch, which started back in 2013, "John Laine from Richardson came over to Mount Pleasant and met with me at

Tennison United Memorial Church. We built a ramp on Fourth Street, it was the first. Three weeks later, he came back again with two men and we worked on another ramp.”

Tom went on to explain that the Titus County branch of TRP builds at least four to ten ramps in the early years. Now, with more volunteers and expanding to other counties, they build much more annually.

Mary is often the one keeping track of all the ramps built and told us, “We had maybe 30 ramps in 2023 and 40 ramps last year. Last Friday, they built the 15th ramp for this year. So at this pace, we could certainly reach that 40 again.”

Mary also took the time to explain how they decide who needs a ramp.

“So someone can contact us on the phone or online,” Mary explained. “If a nurse practitioner, doctor, or home health person recommends it, that’s when they’ll fill out forms.”

That’s when the duo, fondly dubbed as ‘Tom and Jerry’, get to work.

“Tom and I go out and survey the area and design the ramp,” Jerry said. “We determine how much material it will take and then we shop and we build modules. We build four by four and five by five modules. Then we go out to the work site and we put it together.”

Tom and Jerry explained that there are a number of factors to look at, including the area of the home, the slope of the land, and the height between the door and the ground. They also keep track of the kinds of materials used on each ramp. Jerry said they’ve had to rework or tear out old ramps and completely rebuild them. He also said that they’ve moved away from using plywood, and use decking material for a sturdier build and more stylized look.

Having done this since 2013, Tom warmly talked about how he has seen how TRP has made the world a better place, “We built a ramp on East Third Street. The lady there was a Vietnam veteran. We came and built it on a cold day. When she came out, she was crying. She said ‘I can’t believe somebody cared enough about me to build me a ramp.’” The Hearnons have been working in the local TRP branch since they retired four years ago. Mary said she just wants to spread awareness— not just about TRP, but about the needs for disabled people. They also don’t just build ramps in Titus County, they have also done jobs in Camp, Franklin, and Hopkins County.

“We want to just increase awareness and community itself,” Mary said. “People have neighbors and if you see them struggling with access, we want everyone to know that there’s an organization that can provide assistance for that person.”

If you are in need of a ramp or know someone who does, you can visit [www.tennisonumc.org/community-wheelchair-ramps](http://www.tennisonumc.org/community-wheelchair-ramps) to contact the Titus County branch of TRP. They are always looking for more volunteers and you can call 903-572-5341 to sign up.



