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Texas Ramp Project celebrates 40 years, builds 30,000 ramps for homebound residents

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by Jo Anne Embleton Contributor



Volunteers

(Photo provided by the local Texas Ramp Project)

The Texas Ramp Project, a nonprofit organization founded in 1985 to help residents facing mobility challenges, has built approximately 30,000 ramps since then, each project bringing a world of change in the lives of recipients.

"For some of them who are in pretty bad shape, it makes all the difference in the world," said Jerry Halpain, a New Summerfield resident who has been building ramps in Cherokee County since 2013.

Be it someone who is wheelchair-bound, someone using a walker or whose uneven gait makes using steps a challenge, the ramps – built by volunteers within 4-5 hours – gives residents the independence to safely leave their homes whenever they want.

"The ramps give people the ability to get in and out of their homes safely, without worrying about falling down," Halpain said.



Lane is so excited with the new ramp he wanted to share this picture of him and his grandmother looking at it as it was being finished. They hope that seeing their ramp will let anybody with mobility issues know they don't have to be trapped in their homes. Photo provided by the local Texas Ramp Project.

"For people who use a wheelchair or walker, those few steps can turn a home into a prison – more than 1.7 million Texans find themselves in this situation, the majority of them older adults," according to a TRP release, which noted that "almost 23% of Texas residents 65 or older have a disability that limits their mobility.

"Many of these people are unable to afford safe access at their homes. They often remain isolated, have to wait for assistance whenever they have to go out," it added.

Texas Ramp Project is rooted in the Dallas Ramp Project, which formed in 1985 in response to a need for ramps for homebound-bound individuals unable to afford wheelchair ramps.

In East Texas, the local TRP group serves Cherokee, Anderson and Henderson County, growing from a handful of ramps built in 2013 by four or five volunteers, and growing to 60 last year. This year, local volunteers are approximately half-way through a list of 65 requests for ramps. "For every one we do, we get in two (requests)," Halpain said.

Because the ramps are built using volunteer labor, construction costs are minimal: Overhead is minimal, with only two full-time employees who work closely with volunteers across the state who build using donated materials.

As a result, 94% of donations can be directed to program expenses – TRP estimates the average cost of constructing a ramp to be between $800 to $900, about one-third of a typical contractor installation.

"Generosity grows when shared, and it becomes the bridge that lifts others toward hope and independence," said TRP president Keith Henderson. "The generosity and commitment of the Texas Ramp Project 's volunteers, donors and sponsors across Texas make every wheelchair ramp another step toward freedom possible."

The ramps also meet an important need in providing a means for exit in the event of a fire or other emergency, allowing recipients "to leave their homes safely and independently," according to the release. "They provide relief to families and caregivers, and they allow people to remain at home, aging in place surrounded by those who love and care for them."

Halpain is one of nine folks who volunteer locally, of which four who have been with TRP since the first project in 2013. "Three are under age 70, while the rest are older," he said.

Those interested in volunteering with TRP or donating supplies can contact Halpain locally at 972-922-8726, or visit www.texasramps.org/volunteer. Folks also can go online to www.texasramps.org to donate or to sponsor a project.

Although each project is roughly half a day's work, "it changes their lives a great deal," Halpain said of those receiving ramps.