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Young volunteers launch home repair mission

By Kirby Kaufman

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

When organizer Todd Skrzyniarz shouted "Illinois!" inside Grace University's teen-filled auditorium, half of the audience screamed.

Some 215 middle and high school students from six states plus Nebraska were at the university Sunday for the kickoff of a weeklong volunteer effort to improve homes in northeast Omaha.

The Mission Omaha Foundation is working with the youths to paint, weatherproof and build decks and wheelchair ramps.

The young people are from Texas, Oklahoma, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Colorado as well as Nebraska. The initial meeting began at noon Sunday with a barbecue. The students will work all week in teams of five youths and one adult. A total of 36 crews will work at 32 homes. Each participant had to raise \$448 to cover room and board.

Mission Omaha, the sponsoring organization, raised about \$68,000 to cover materials and other costs. Most of that came from donations from NP Dodge, Catholic Charities, Rebuilding Together and Brush Up Nebraska.

Mary Rosenthal, Mission Omaha president, said fundraising continues.

Mission Omaha is working with Group Workcamps Foundation, a nonprofit that sponsors mission trips that send teens to cities to help elderly, low-income and disabled homeowners.

The foundation organizes trips throughout the country. This is the first year it has worked in Omaha.

Rosenthal said the effort brings people together to make a difference for people like Michael Fideler.

The 62-year-old Omaha man is having his self-described "blistering" yellow home repainted this week.

"I appreciate it a lot. I mean I can't do much anymore because I lost a leg and I'm on dialysis three days a week," Fideler said.

Fideler said the house hasn't been painted in about 12 years.

The volunteers hit the streets today and wrap up Friday.

Rosenthal said the experience also helps the helpers.

"It gives them a chance to share in their faith, help someone who needs their help and grow themselves spiritually," she said.

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