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Workcamp under way to fix homes of needy in Bayshore

By *TERRY GAUTHIER MUESSIG*
KEYPORT BUREAU

Thousands of dollars worth of paint, lumber and other home-repair supplies have been delivered to 65 homes in the Bayshore area — ready to be put to use at no cost to the homeowners.

The third New Jersey Group Workcamp program began its weeklong home-repair mission project on Monday.

On Sunday, 405 Christian youths and adults from across the country converged on the Bayshore to work on residents' homes for free. They expect to complete the projects by Friday.

The volunteers stay for the week at the Keansburg High School, where they sleep in sleeping bags in empty classrooms.

"It takes about two years to prepare for a mission," said Bill Bechtoldt of Hazlet, the local organizer. He and his wife, Gail Bechtoldt, have been Group Workcamp volunteers for more than 20 years.

The local group is a nonprofit charity co-sponsored by St. John's United Methodist Church in Hazlet and Group Workcamps Foundation, based in Loveland, Colo. Throughout the summer, volunteer groups for the foundation go on home repair missions throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

The volunteers, who range in age from 15 to 70, pay about \$400 to participate in the program and also pay for traveling expenses.

The local volunteers began delivering supplies to the homes on June 29. The almost \$10,000 worth of supplies such as the paint, caulk, masking tape, masks, gloves and ladders were stored at the church.

Prior to the volunteers coming to the workcamp, the local volunteers completed some of the preliminary work at a few of the sites, such as securing permits, digging 36-inch holes for cement footings (for wheelchair ramps) and had lumber delivered to the sites.

The work to be conducted during the week includes exterior painting, building or repairing wheelchair ramps, limited porch repair or construction, mobile-home roof coating, interior painting, weatherization, limited exterior step repair or construction, and mobile home underpinning repair or installation.

The workcamp program does not perform major construction. However, this year, there is a home in Hazlet in dire need of a roof, Bechtoldt said.

"We'll figure it out," he said.

Larry DiGiorgio of Hazlet, the owner of F & D Construction and Property Maintenance, is helping Bechtoldt with the roofing project. DiGiorgio has volunteered his services at prior workcamps, he said. He usually donates his labor costs and the Dumpsters needed for the projects.

"We help people that need help," said Hazlet resident Linda Schleicher, who has been a volunteer for two decades.

At one site, the homeowner needed about 21 gallons of paint.

"This is a big house that needs to be painted, and the homeowner needs our help," she said.

Now that the 2009 work is getting under way, there is little time to rest. Plans are already being set for the next Workcamp to take place in two years, Bill Bechtoldt said.

"I've already started preparing for the 2011 event," he said.
