



Print this Page

[Return to story](#)

Crew makes disabled vet's home accessible

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BY AMY FLOWERS UMBLE

During World War II, Larry Adrian moved around a lot. He fixed airplanes in France, Italy, Tunisia and Germany--never staying in one place longer than three months.

These days, the 88-year-old Adrian finds it much harder to get around.

Just getting out of his Spotsylvania County home has become an ordeal since Adrian started using a wheelchair in October.

When he and his wife bought the home in 1983 it seemed perfect for the empty-nesters.

But "the house is not built for 'later on in life,'" Adrian said, holding up air quotes around the phrase. "Let's face it, it's built for young families."

Nerve damage and a curved spine make it hard for Adrian to walk and to bathe. His wife, Ingrid, helps him clean up using a small basin.

The couple's shower and bathtub don't fit Adrian's needs.

The glass shower doors are impossible to maneuver. And without them, taking a bath just becomes one big mess.

But in about two weeks, Adrian will be able to roll himself into the shower.

He'll also be able to roll out his front door onto a wheelchair ramp.

And the renovations haven't cost the couple a penny.

"It's good," Ingrid said. "We couldn't afford to do all of this, that's for sure."



Volunteers for Rebuilding Together install a wheelchair ramp yesterday for Larry Adrian at his home in Spotswood Estates.



In 1939, Larry Adrian joined the United States Army Air Corps.

Adrian started using the wheelchair in October. In December, Ingrid saw a notice in the newspaper that a volunteer group called Rebuilding Together was looking for homes to fix up.

The local group is part of a national movement that matches volunteer rehabbers with low-income homeowners.

Rebuilding Together Fredericksburg leaders said the Adrians were ideal candidates.

"When I heard that he was a World War II veteran, I definitely wanted to help," said David Way, a board member. "Because one day, I'll be the old Vietnam vet who needs this kind of help."

The workers were volunteers. But the work wouldn't be cheap.

"For Rebuilding Together, this project would've been pushing the envelope financially," Way said.

So he reached out to another program: Sears' Heroes at Home. That project is a national partnership between Sears Holdings Corp. and Rebuilding Together, and works to provide renovations for veterans.

The initiative gave \$12,000 for the Adrians' renovations, which paid for materials and allowed the team to hire a professional plumber. It will also supply the Adrians with a new washer and dryer.

Rebuilding Together takes on projects throughout the year, but most take place on the same day in April.

This year, volunteers worked on most projects yesterday. About a dozen took place throughout the Fredericksburg area. Most were in the city of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania and Stafford counties. The chapter in Orange and Louisa counties also worked on a project in Locust Grove.

The groups will work on more than 20 homes before the end of April.

Way had done some work on the Adrians' home in previous weeks, but about 10 volunteers showed up yesterday to do most of the work.

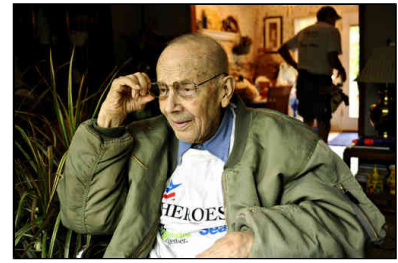
As Adrian talked about his World War II days, volunteers dug holes for the wheelchair ramp, worked in the bathroom and trimmed bushes.

As Adrian recalled the sound of an ammunition ship getting bombed--"My ears rang for almost a week"--the gentle whir of power tools and the scraping sounds of digging filled his home.

He recounted that Mount Vesuvius' eruption was surprisingly quiet as the sharp "ping" of a dropped tool and the "tap, tap, tap" of a hammer carried through the air.

Adrian enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in May 1939, and learned to repair planes. In 1941 he headed for England. He went on to serve in Africa and Europe.

"We had some wild times," he said.



Larry Adrian is a disabled World War II veteran living in Spotsylvania. He looks out his front window yesterday as volunteers from Rebuilding Together install a wheelchair ramp. The crew also renovated a bathroom for him.

He left the service in 1945 and returned to his native Long Island. There he met Ingrid, whose family vacationed on the island.

The couple married and raised three sons on Long Island. The oldest moved to Spotsylvania when he couldn't find a teaching job in New York.

He built a house in Spotswood Estates in 1981. His two younger brothers followed him to the area. And in 1983, his parents headed south, too.

They were first enamored with the area's rural atmosphere. Long Island was experiencing a building boom. Spotsylvania reminded the Adrians' of Long Island's earlier days.

They planned to build a house off Courthouse Road, but the builder went out of business. So their son offered to get a new place and the Adrians bought his home.

Adrian loved the lush yard, where he lovingly tended a garden producing melons, tomatoes, pumpkins and eggplants.

However, Adrian's health declined. He had multiple operations, including surgeries on his spine and his heart. Over the years, those operations took a toll. He started using a cane in 2002, and then used a walker before the wheelchair.

Then the home didn't seem so perfect. The narrow doorways, inaccessible bathroom and front steps became stumbling blocks.

But watching the men work on their home, Ingrid and Adrian said things will be much easier.

"This is such a blessing," she said.

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Rebuilding Together takes applications year-round from homeowners in need. To qualify, homeowners must be low-income. Organizers focus on those who are elderly or disabled. For details, visit rebuildingtogetherfbg.org or call 540/373-9807 or 540/419-3799. Homeowners must live in Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania or Stafford.

Homeowners in Orange or Louisa should call 540/832-2347.

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