

Project Ramp continues to help break barriers

By Michael J. Smith

United Way Monroe/Lenawee County
For The Daily Telegram

Perhaps the most critical barrier to overcome for a person with a disability is the barrier to his or her home. For someone with mobility impairment, even one step can be an impossible barrier.

A home can be a virtual prison if it is not designed for wheelchair access. But a ramp can provide freedom for people with disabilities to come and go independently.

A ramp can access available to schools, stores, churches, medical care and fun outings with family and friends. Unfortunately, a ramp is only one part of the solution. Money is the other part, the part that puts ramps out of reach for many people who need them. And many people with disabilities are unemployed and surviving on Social Security.

Project Ramp can help. After several months of working together to address the ramp needs locally, Project Ramp - Lenawee will now be under the umbrella of the partnership between the United Way

of Monroe/Lenawee Counties and the Monroe/Lenawee County AFL-CIO Central Labor Council.

This task force is comprised of Lenawee County Department of Aging, UAW Ford Ramp Program, Habitat for Humanity, Community Action Agency, Housing Help of Lenawee, Helping Hands, Area Agency on Aging, Goodwill and disAbility Connections.

The Monroe/Lenawee County AFL-CIO Central Labor Council's Community Services/Community Action Liaison Program in partnership with United Way of Monroe/Lenawee Counties has a 30-year history administering the Project Ramp program.

Volunteers involved in the project include representatives from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America local 687 Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters & Millwrights, UA Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 671 AFL-CIO, Gerdau Special Steel North America in partnership with UAW 723 AFL-CIO, Salvation Army Harbor Light and United Steelworkers local



A ramp built by volunteers with Project Ramp. [COURTESY PHOTO]

2511 AFL-CIO.

All donate their time and talent to construct these ramps. Since 2012, UAW-Ford teams have built more than 2,000 ramps around the United States.

During the 2019 building season United Way Project Ramp and UAW-Ford Ramp Program built 30 ramps. The end of our season is rapidly approaching, but we hope to build as many as 10 additional ramps. In the past 30 years, 218 ramps have been built.

Funding thus far for Lenawee County has come from Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph's Health Plan Fund, Lenawee

Department on Aging, First Federal Bank and Huntington Bank. They have all financially sponsored ramps in Lenawee County as has the Adrian Morning Rotary. The Adrian Morning Rotary also donated their time and talent constructing a ramp.

"Although Project Ramp has been a part of the United Way of Monroe/Lenawee Counties for many years, the grant funds from the Monroe County Commission on Aging have allowed the program to grow," said Connie L. Carroll, Executive Director of the United Way of Monroe/Lenawee Counties.

"Mike Smith, our Community Services Liaison, has done an exceptional job of managing Project Ramp for increased service to our communities. This is just one of the many ways the United Way helps in Monroe/Lenawee Counties."

However, funding remains an issue. Each wooden ramp for a homeowner costs approximately \$1,800. For those who would like to help "build freedom" for persons in Monroe or Lenawee Counties with mobility issues, donations are accepted through the United Way of Monroe/Lenawee Counties.

Please earmark donations to "Project Ramp - Lenawee or Monroe" and send donations to 136 E. Maumee St., Suite 15, Adrian, MI 49221 or 216 N. Monroe St Monroe, MI 48162. Donations can be made at www.unitedwaymlc.org.

For those with additional questions or who would like to apply for ramp assistance, contact Mike Smith, Project Ramp Coordinator, United Way of Monroe/Lenawee Counties at (517) 264-6821 or (734) 242-1331 or msmith@unitedwaymlc.org.