

Teens help repair homes in Beaufort, Jasper counties

By RACHEL HEATON

rheaton@beaufortgazette.com

843-706-8177

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More than 350 teens have spread out across Beaufort and Jasper counties this week to paint, power wash, build handicapped ramps and perform landscaping duties.

The teens are participating in the Catholic HEART Workcamp, coordinated locally through the United Way of the Lowcountry, to help the elderly, the disabled and families in need with home repairs. It is one of more than 40 such camps throughout the country this year. HEART stands for "Helping Everyone Attain Repairs Today."

The teens say they came to the Lowcountry because they want to give back.

"I've been so blessed with everything God has given me -- not just the stuff I have, but my talents," 16-year-old Katie Hooven of Georgetown, Ky., said. "I want to share that."

In its 14th year, the camp draws teens from around the country. This year they are working on about 60 projects, according to the United Way.

They fan out in seven-member teams to complete the repairs. Some don't have much experience.

Ben Hepburn, 15, of Atlanta said he hasn't painted much before, so he's learned the importance of primer while working on a home on Guerrard Avenue in Bluffton.

Others have participated in the camp before or volunteered in other areas to spruce up homes or shelters.

"It's fun to see our progress," 16-year-old Valerie Kay of Greensboro, N.C., said while painting the Guerrard Avenue home. The home was dingy and needed cleaning, she said, and the fresh coat of paint has made a big difference.

A team working on a home on Bruin Street in Bluffton said the hard work is appreciated. The homeowner called them "angels," the teens said.

They've been a bit surprised, too, at how the homeowner has welcomed them -- allowing them to take breaks in her living room and even loaning a T-shirt to 15-year-old Asia Mateo when hers was soaked with water.

"She's been so open," Mateo, of Greensboro, said.

The teens have made new friends from around the country. And today, after the hard work is done, they will get some time off to sightsee and enjoy the beach.

"It's a good feeling, knowing I've helped," Kay said.

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