

New (Special) Home Going Up In Township

Sylvania Township Trustee Neal Mahoney said it was a humbling and an emotional time during a house closing at the offices of Midland Title Co, where he works.

Real estate closings aren't often described in those terms, but Mr. Mahoney told a crowd gathered for a groundbreaking for a new home for Valerie Taylor and her parents, Veronica and Tom, on Cason Avenue, that it had been an honor to help in putting the deal together.

The deal was a project, a crusade really, which began when fellow Southview High School students noticed the problems encountered by the Taylors in getting Valerie out of the house and onto the school bus.

The high schooler has a number of health issues and uses a wheelchair for her mobility. Because of the size of doorways and other space limitations in the 540 sq. ft. home, Valerie's parents had to carry her from room to room.

The problems which faced the family on a daily basis were brought to the attention of schoolmates Catie Sack and Logan Griesinger, seniors who are active in the school's annual student-led fundraiser, Dance For A Chance.

They brought the issue to the attention of school officials and it was determined that the event last March would focus on accessibility issues faced by people confined to wheelchairs and that it would specifically address the problems faced by the Taylor family.

The fundraiser was dubbed HAVEN which stands for Home Accessibility for Valerie's Exceptional Needs.

In addition to recruiting sponsors for the annual event, which requires students to dance or at least stay on their feet and be active for 12 hours, students began to hold car washes and to have special nights at restaurants where HAVEN could get part of the proceeds.

In all, this year's Dance For A Chance raised \$32,000.

The Ability Center of Greater Toledo directed the project leaders to the Professional Remodelers Organization and that group adopted Project HAVEN as its President's Project for this year.

The organization has pledged funds and volunteer work and building supplies to construct a new home on the site after razing the Taylors' current home. The original plan had been to remodel the current house, but there were too many problems with the structure, so officials at PRO decided to build a new home on the property. It will be about 1,550 sq. ft.

As Mr. Mahoney pointed out in his remarks that, "there have been a lot of moving parts," which needed to mesh in order for the groundbreaking to take place. He credited John Jennewine, chairman of the trustees who also attended the groundbreaking, for making sure township requirements were met without holding up the process. Also at the groundbreaking was Kevin Haddad, trustee.

The Sylvania Township Board of Zoning Appeals had approved the family living in the existing home while the new home is under construction, but that became unnecessary when a local hotel made arrangements to allow the family to stay there.

Mr. Mahoney said later that another moving part had been financing for the project and that, although unusual, a package was presented to Metamora State Bank and bank officials worked to make the loan go through.

Carly Conover, who said she was honored to be Valerie's teacher, remarked that teachers want to impart lessons that will impact their students, but through Project HAVEN "I've been taught something," by the Southview students.

Her thoughts were echoed by Southview Principal Dave McMurray, who said how, "very proud," he is of the student body.

As the ceremony was about to begin a senior, Jacob Anderson, said he was anxious to get the project underway. He is one of the students in Construction Technologies at Southview who will be working on the construction of the new home.

"I'm just excited to be able to help out Val," he said of his schoolmate.

Bob Johnson, an instructor in the program at the high school, said the students will be on site "from dawn to dusk," in order to finish construction as soon as possible.

The first turn of spades of dirt were accompanied by a drum roll from the pep band and Southview cheerleaders twirled flags and went through routines as the project got underway.

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