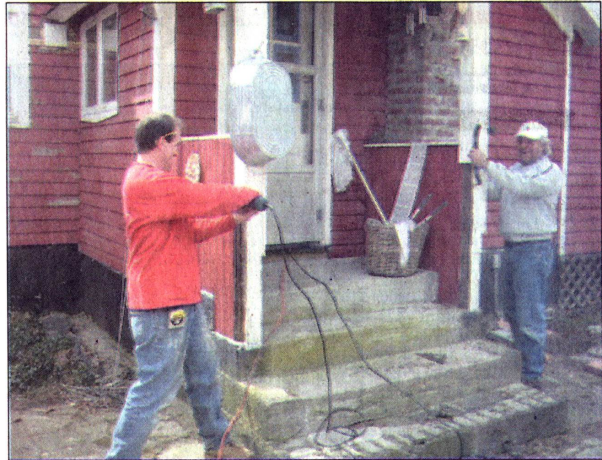


Danbury News-Times



Peter Brady, of the Handy Dandy Handyman Ministry, finishes off the demolition of a garden shed at the home of Denise Gearin in New Milford.



Tom Meyer, left, a carpenter from Southbury, works on Denise Gearin's house with Rob Grenier, a carpenter and owner of House Medic in New Milford.

Helping a hard-working mom

Ministry comes to the rescue

Brookfield man's Handy Dandy Handyman

By Susan Tuz
Staff Writer



Norm Cummings/Staff photographer
Peter Brady, left, organized the renovation of this New Milford home. He's with house owner Denise Gearin, third from the left, and members of her family. From left are Brady; Gearin's son, Lance; Gearin; her daughter, Elise; her niece, Katie Capossela; her sister, Ann Capossela; her nephew, Ricky Capossela; her sister, Maureen Dandanel; and her parents, Mary and Richard Dandanel.

NEW MILFORD -- Denise Gearin is a single mom. And even though she works five jobs to make ends meet, she counts her blessings every day.

One of those blessings has involved a much-needed makeover of her home, spearheaded by Peter Brady and the Handy Dandy Handyman ministry.

Gearin needed help because no matter where she looked, something was falling apart.

"I had been trying to duct tape my gutters back up," she said. "Trees were crowding and rotting my roof. The retaining wall was falling apart. It was falling apart around me and I didn't know where to begin or how I was going to do it."

Watching her property deteriorate, she felt she was losing the one asset she had in the world. Then she met Brady.

A retired director of purchasing at the former Nestlé, Brady volunteers his time through the ministry he started, called Handy Dandy Handyman (HDHM). Founded through St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Brookfield, HDHM helps local people in need.

Assistance is provided through activities such as the annual Rake 'n' Bake, where volunteers help folks with tasks (such as raking leaves) followed by a lunch.

Brady became aware of Gearin's situation after her younger sister, Ann Capossela, signed Gearin up

for assistance through last year's Rake 'n' Bake.

"Denise's name was lost in a paperwork mix-up and when Peter heard that, he felt so bad that he went up to her house with two other men to rake the yard," Capossela said.

"When he saw the condition the house and property were in, he called me. From there he talked to my dad, who had been in construction, about what work the house needed. The next day, I saw an e-mail he'd sent out through the church and to contractors saying he needed help to do something for Denise."

That "something" turned out to be the biggest project Brady's ministry has undertaken.

During this past month the roof on Gearin's house was replaced and plumbing was repaired and installed. Three large trees crowding the house were taken down and the concrete front steps were demolished and re-done. The list goes on.

"Peter Brady is a wonderful man," said Gearin, a mother of two. "And all the people who have been giving up their time to work on my house, doing tough jobs like cutting down trees when they could be home with their families -- it's wonderful."

Next Saturday, April 19, a huge outdoor painting party will put the finishing touches on the house. Then AJ Construction of Brookfield will come in and blacktop the driveway.

"Saturday there were 25 people out at the house working," Gearin said on April 1. "There was a feeling of joy throughout the house; it's a beautiful thing."

Brady explained the good he does for others through HDHM is his response "to the calling of the Holy Spirit.

"I personally have been given so much in life -- a great family, great health and financial security -- I felt I ought to give back what the Lord had given me," he said.

Brady first had the idea for the ministry in 1999 when he was attending Mass at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Brookfield. He was listening to a homily about St. Peter and all the good he did for others.



Volunteer painters are, from front to rear, Rick Capossella, nephew of homeowner Denise Gearin; Elise Gearin, the homeowner's daughter; and Kerri Brady, daughter of Peter and Carol Ann Brady.

From there, Handy Dandy Handyman was conceived and became part of the ministry of St. Joseph's. At the time, Brady was still working at the former Nestlé in New Milford. But in 2000, at age 58, he retired and threw himself full time into HDHM.

The number of volunteers and cost of projects soon grew too large for St. Joseph's to continue as the ministry's financial arm. In 2004, Brady formed Handy Dandy Handyman Ministry, a nonprofit under the government's 501-C3 program. St. Joseph's remains the ministry's spiritual base.

Today, Brady cites 1,000-plus volunteers and says HDHM has assisted more than 300 clients in seven towns. "There's tremendous joy in what we do," he said. "It's instant gratification for me and the folks who help me."

Brady has an e-mail address list of 2,000. When he hears of someone in need, he sends out a message and HDHM volunteers respond. Some of the volunteers are handymen and contractors; many are just regular people, including

families

Tom Meyer, of Southbury, does carpentry work with HDHM and is helping on Gearin's house. When asked to describe Brady, Meyer said he's "a very dynamic man with a heart of gold," and a terrific motivator.

"He's a person who can make things happen," added Meyer. "He's tireless and he'll do what he can to make things better for others. It's hard to meet him and not become part of what he does."

HDHM projects usually take only two to three days to complete. Brady said he was moved to develop such an all-inclusive makeover for Gearin because of the hard work she does and her desperate need.

Gearin's work --- her five jobs --- include loading trucks for UPS in the early mornings, making sandwiches at Delitalia Delicatessen in New Milford, and teaching kickboxing at Double Dragon DoJo, also of New Milford. When she dons her waitress apron, it's either at Italia Mia in New Milford or Tuscany Restaurant and Pizzeria.

Despite all of those jobs, Gearin was in dire straits when it came to maintaining her property. After septic work and a new furnace had eaten up her savings, the remaining tasks appeared beyond her reach.

Brady figures the cost to complete everything -- with donated services, materials and cash spent --- was \$27,000. And thanks to all those volunteers, Gearin's home is no longer in a state of disrepair.

Meanwhile she continues to work and count her blessings.

No further volunteers are needed for Gearin's property, but if you want to help with future projects, send an e-mail to peterbrady@hdhm.org. For more on Handy Dandy Handyman, visit www.hdhm.org.

CONTRACTORS VOLUNTEER THEIR TIME

These contractors donated a total of \$25,000 in labor and materials.

■ BROOKFIELD DONORS

Kenny Aiello, Aillo Roofing

Jim Beardsley, Beardsley Plumbing

Ray Boa, AJ Construction-Driveway

John Pastor, All American Roll-Off

Gary Stein, CT. Concrete Sawing Co.

Joe Genovese, JMG Lawn Services

Thomas LaBarbera, Tom's Iron Works

Rick Zucca, Lew White Appliances

Mark Hunihan, Overhead Garage Door Co.

■ BRIDGEWATER DONOR

Steve Greene, Steve Greene Painting Co.

■ BETHEL DONORS

Mike Loya, Rings End Lumber

Bob Tedrick, Carpenter

■ DANBURY DONORS

Andrew Barboza, Loft Flooring

Design

Sam Heelan, Iovino Brothers

Henry Augusewicz, EMA Electric

Peter Cohan, Bertucci's Restaurant

■ NEW MILFORD DONOR

Rob Grenier, House Medic

■ SANDY HOOK DONOR

Bill Landgrebe, Timber Ridge Services

■ SHERMAN DONOR

Bill Hunniford, American Pie Company

■ SOUTHBURY DONORS

Joe Lasky, Two Brothers Tree Service

Tom Meyer, Carpenter

■ RIDGEFIELD DONOR

Chris Baliko, Growing Solutions

■ CARMEL, N.Y. DONOR

Cathy Colman, CMC Bookkeeping Co.

■ REGIONAL DONORS

50 Handy Dandy Handyman Volunteers from throughout the area.

Key donors to home makeover

■ Ellen Knowles Harcourt Foundation --- \$10,000

■ Albert W. & Helen C. Meserve Memorial Fund --- \$3,500

■ Boehringer Ingelheim Cares Foundation, Inc. --- \$2,000

■ One Anonymous Donation --- \$3,000

■ 87 Individual Family Donors --- \$13,207

■ Total Community Financial Support --- \$31,707