

Encinitas Rotary's 'Home Team' volunteers help seniors

By Diane Y. Welch 7 a.m. Jan. 16, 2015



Rotary Home Team members Pete Fitzpatrick, foreground, Dan Daniels (on ladder) and Bill Wachtler, at rear, work on the patio. — *Courtesy photo*

For Encinitas senior citizens who may be struggling with physical limitations or on fixed incomes and facing financial difficulties, a team of dedicated Rotarians is ready and willing to assist with their basic household repairs.

The Home Team, a sub-committee of the Encinitas Rotary Club, was formed in response to the needs of Encinitas seniors who were unable to manage small but important jobs around their homes.

Jim Wade is a member of the volunteer-run committee, which is self-sufficient and not reliant on Rotary Club funds.

"In fact, after our initial fundraising event — a pancake breakfast held at the Encinitas Community and Senior Center — we even donated \$1,500 back to our club for unrelated uses from those proceeds," said Wade.

About 25 volunteers — men and women from the Rotary club's 90 members — donate their time regularly to the Home Team.

Part of the greater Rotary International, with a motto of "Service Above Self," the club has had a long-standing focus on serving Encinitas' youth, said Rotarian Roger Bolus. But one of his goals in 2011 — when he was club president — was to extend that focus "to the other end of the distribution" he said.

Bolus modeled the idea of what the club could offer seniors on experience with his own elderly mother, who lives alone on the East Coast.

"When she needed small jobs done around the home she would end up paying full-service prices for something simple, like changing a light bulb or replacing a washer," Bolus said.

This sparked the idea of how Rotarians could fill this need for those in similar situations in the local community, and with Wade and Doug Day, Bolus founded the Home Team.

Fliers distributed at the Encinitas Community and Senior Center spread word of the Home Team's volunteer work. A direct dial-in phone number goes through Google and is translated into an email that is sent to Wade, who serves as Home Team coordinator.

Wade assigns the work, as he knows who has specific skills, and jobs are generally completed within two weeks.

Projects are mostly restricted to those who are physically limited or have financial hardship. A recent project — painting a senior's mobile home — was supervised by Bolus, who led a team of four who gave the home's exterior a fresh look in only two hours.

Homeowners sign a simple liability waiver before work is begun. There is no fine print and no charge. If a project is beyond the scope of the volunteers, homeowners are given recommendations to local businesses.

During the Home Team's existence, it has replaced torn screens, broken doors, garbage disposals, gutters, light fixtures, toilets, steps, handrails, faucets, smoke alarms and batteries. Volunteers have also weeded, planted and pruned gardens and trees.

"Some of the calls would bring tears to my eyes," said Wade. "Like the 80-year-old lady who called for help to replace light bulbs. When I asked her how many needed replacing, she replied, 'All of them, but I can only afford to buy two bulbs a month.'"

All the work is done by Rotarian volunteers made up of doctors, lawyers, former mayors, mechanics, artists, landscapers and retirees, said Wade. "It's a wonderful group of folks, and we really have fun helping Encinitas seniors!"

Those who need Home Team handyman services can call 760-933-8502. Leave your name, address, phone number, best time to call, and what the items needing attention are. Jim Wade will call back to schedule the maintenance, which is usually completed on Saturday mornings.

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