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Story: Building a Sense of Community

Jennifer woke up at 4 a.m., two hours before her alarm. Today was the day her century old house was getting a fresh coat of paint and she was too excited to sleep. When volunteers from Thrivent Financial arrived around 9 a.m., Jennifer was already dipping her brush.

The tidy little ranch with a Victorian flair is one of three homes on Jefferson Avenue that were spruced up as part of Rock the Block in Woodland Heights. Thrivent Financial sponsored the homes and paid for a fleet of lawn mowers and trimmers. More than 100 volunteers from CoxHealth swarmed like worker bees to mow yards, cut back landscaping and clear brush. In all, 17 projects were completed.

One home in particular was getting consumed by weeds. Volunteers pulled vines off the two-story house and cleared the ground. The homeowner, a soft-spoken elderly woman named Joann, was amazed by the buzz of activity. When the volunteers were told to stop (they did not want to quit), they took group pictures and lingered in the front yard. Joann was heard saying to the team leader, "I'll miss you."

Cleaning one street in one day improves the appearance of a specific area while building community. Residents on Jefferson Avenue were encouraged to get involved to help their own neighborhood. This is Neighborhood Revitalization (NR) in action.

NR is a resident-driven effort to improve quality of life for everyone through goals, planning and partners. Habitat for Humanity of Springfield is a coalition member and is assisting Woodland Heights in creating a sustainable infrastructure for change. Change will happen through the hard work of engaged citizens, partnerships with civic and business groups and a renewed community spirit.

Habitat is known for building houses and it will continue to help low-income families realize the dream of owning a home. Habitat for Humanity of Springfield also repairs homes and is focused on improving housing in Woodland Heights. But NR is so much more.

NR makes a greater impact on people's lives by creating partnerships that address many different quality of life issues. In Woodland Heights, the goal is to not only improve housing, but address crime and safety, work with landlords, encourage economic development, create healthier living environments and build a sense of community.

On the day of Rock the Block, there was a clear sense of community as volunteers worked alongside residents. For those residents who weren't able to pitch in, providing water bottles or a simple "thank you" was enough. Homeowners and renters on Jefferson Avenue got the message that people in Springfield want this neighborhood in Zone 1 to be a safe and vibrant place to live. Progress will come one day at a time and one block at a time.

By: Melissa Adler, Community Outreach Development Associate for Habitat for Humanity of Springfield, MO.

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About Habitat for Humanity of Springfield, Missouri

Habitat for Humanity of Springfield, Missouri (HFHS) believes every person in the Springfield and surrounding area deserves a decent place to live. As an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, HFHS impacts more than 130 households a year. Since 1988, HFHS has either built or renovated more than 490 homes, providing shelter for more than 998 men, women and children from Greene, Christian, and Webster Counties by helping people gain strength, stability and independence through housing, including home construction, rehabilitation and repairs and by increasing access to improved shelter through products and programs. HFHS is a United Way of the Ozarks partner agency. Learn more, including official word marks and images, at habitatspringfieldmo.org/newsroom or at [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

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