

Nonprofit aims to restore community

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Project Point Five



Volunteer Tony Quinn clears out an old and dilapidated shed in Sandra Stedman's backyard Monday. Stedman's house is the first to be relandscaped as part of the Redeem Their Time initiative, under Project Point Five.

Jasmine Gallup | The Sanford Herald

Volunteer Tony Quinn wants to build a community.

"There is no community if you don't have people working and coming together," Quinn said Monday as he cleared out an old shed behind a house on Washington Avenue. "We're trying to restore that community bond. We're trying to foster that."

Quinn is the organizer of the "Redeem Their Time" initiative, an effort to do basic repairs on the homes of senior citizens in low-income areas of Sanford. The initiative started when Quinn met Sandra Stedman, a 65-year-old woman who lives in a small home on Washington Avenue.

"She's the third generation to live in this house," Quinn said. "A lot of people were born and raised here. They never left."

The two got to talking about problems in the neighborhood — shootings just blocks away, people speeding up and down the street. Stedman also mentioned she had hoped for years to clear out some of the vines and overgrown trees on her property, but hadn't yet been able to.

Quinn may not have been able to help with Stedman's other problems — at least, not yet — but one thing he could do was cut branches and haul away debris in his pickup, he said. Thus began the "Redeem Their Time" initiative, under the leadership of Leon Jackson, founder of community nonprofit Project Point Five.

Jackson and Quinn also partnered with nonprofits Habitat for Humanity and Baptists On Mission and hope to organize larger volunteer events in the future.

"We have created a grid of Sanford ... and we're gonna use that (map) to continue 'Redeem Their Time' and help these senior citizens restore some of their self-dignity, as well as hope," Quinn said. "I hope it will generate the community unity that we all talk about but rarely see."

For weeks, Quinn has been visiting Stedman's house daily to cut away vines, trim overgrown trees and hedges, weed and clear the asphalt driveway of vegetation, and generally just fix up her property. His current project is clearing out an old and half-collapsed shed in Stedman's backyard. Quinn will eventually tear down the shed, leaving a small concrete area for a patio where Stedman can hopefully enjoy nice summer days, he said.

As the initiative grows, Quinn hopes to eventually recruit troubled teens and people recently released from prison, he said. The initiative can give them a place to work, a way to learn new skills and an opportunity to reconnect to people in their neighborhood, Quinn said.

"What we're trying to do is bring it all together, so we'll have a place where troubled youth and teens will always have a job," he said. "This'll be a great environment for them to excel and grow, learn trades, learn soft skills."

Eventually, Quinn and Jackson hope to connect their various community projects into one joint effort to help those in need.

"When we talk about community, we talk about communing and unity," Jackson said. "We want to re-establish that communing aspect of getting to know each other, and forming that unity. Back in the olden days, everyone used to watch out for someone and care about (someone). We want to bring that back in."