

Nonprofit upgrading homes for seniors



From left: Tom Duffey, owner of Duffey's Mobile Home Service, talks with Henry "Hank" Heeber as Jim Mitchell and Shawn Speer get ready to install a new window on his Thousand Oaks mobile home. JOE LUMAYA/SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Organization steps up to help out low-income residents

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Henry "Hank" Heeber, 90, and his wife, Mardell, 94, got new energy-efficient windows installed in their residence in the Ranch Mobile Home Park in Thousand Oaks last week.

Heeber, a World War II veteran, didn't pay for them. Living on Social Security and taking care of his wife, who has Alzheimer's, he couldn't afford to.

The windows were paid for out of a \$139,055 Department of Housing and Urban Development grant the nonprofit Senior Alliance for Empowerment applied for and received for 2016-17

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Senior Alliance for Empowerment

through the city of Thousand Oaks, said the group's treasurer, Jim Wolf.

Heeber is thrilled with his new double-glazed windows, which Wolf, 80, says will save the fixed-income couple considerable money on heating and air

conditioning.

"What a nice gift this is," Heeber said. "I couldn't believe it."

Another very low-income park resident, Joan Osborne, 88, got a new furnace in her home, also paid for by the federal money — a community development block grant. Like Heeber, she too is happy with the upgrade.

"Oh yeah, sure," she said with a laugh.

SAFE has used the grant for similar projects for very low-income senior residents of the Thunderbird Oaks Mobile Home Club, also in Thousand Oaks. Two homes there got the new energy ef-

See SAFE, Page 2A



Susie Ringheim and her father, Henry "Hank" Heeber, look at the newly installed energy-efficient window in his Thousand Oaks mobile home.

PHOTOS BY JOE LUMAYA/SPECIAL TO THE STAR



Susie Ringheim helps Tom Jenks, from Duffey's Mobile Home Service, remove one of the windows from her father's Thousand Oaks home. The nonprofit Senior Alliance for Empowerment used a grant to replace windows on the mobile home.

SAFE

Continued from Page 1A

efficient windows and four homes got new roofs.

The nonprofit has been awarded another HUD community development block grant for \$145,000 for 2017-18 and will use it for upgrades for very low-income senior residents of five other mobile home parks in Thousand Oaks, said Kathryn Goodspeed, 78, president of SAFE. She and Wolf live in the Ranch Mobile Home Park.

SAFE says it's an advocate for very low-income seniors, particularly veterans and women of the "Greatest Generation" — those who lived through the Great Depression and World War II.

Veterans, the group says, sacrificed

income-earning years to serve their country, while women were denied income opportunities due to the customs of their generation.

"SAFE's goal is to allow this target generation to remain in their homes and to maintain their independence and dignity," the group says. "It is a generation which is fiercely independent but grossly underserved and deserving of our gratitude and assistance."

Goodspeed and Wolf say they're grateful for the HUD grants, as are the mobile home park residents who benefit from them.

"It's doing stuff for them that they couldn't possibly afford," Wolf said. "The people with roofing problems could actually be driven out of their homes and then they'd have to either go on public welfare or be homeless because a lot of them don't have any family

left at their age."

Wolf said about 60 percent of the Ranch Mobile Home Park's residents are very low-income.

"In Thousand Oaks, where you have an average income of \$85,000 a year, people living off of \$1,200 or \$1,500 a month in Social Security, it makes it very, very difficult for them to be able to buy a furnace that costs \$5,000 or \$6,000," he said. "Or those windows. If Hank was going to do these windows himself, it would cost him about \$8,000."

Living on fixed incomes can be extremely challenging, Wolf said.

"Are we going to have food this month or are we going to have medicine this month?" he said. "Some of them are in pretty bad positions. Everything is costing a lot more these days, especially energy and food."

Duffey's Mobile Home Services, based in Simi Valley, installed the Heebers' new windows and Osborne's new furnace.

Owner Tom Duffey said the work is rewarding.

"It really helps these people out," he said. "A lot of these people are very low-income."

He said Osborne has "been complaining about her electric bill because of a plug-in type heater she's temporarily using. You know that meter is spinning like crazy. So, we're hopping on this to get her back on a gas heater."

"It's a good project to work on," he said.

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