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Restoring hope in homes for the elderly

BY [ELIZABETH CAMPBELL](#)



Proud: Anna Maria Sanchez with her newly-repaired home in Euless, Texas.

A volunteer programme in Texas, US, gives the elderly a helping hand.

Anna Maria Sanchez likes to keep her home painted and yard neatly kept, but the tasks became too much for her. Sanchez, 75, a cancer survivor who also has other health problems, worked all her life and never thought of asking for help. But when maintaining her home became too difficult, she turned to 6 Stones, a non-profit group.

Her daughter Nora read about 6 Stones, which helps fix up homes for low-income residents as part of its community power revitalisation programme. She

helped her mother apply, and volunteers spent three days in the spring repairing doors, painting, cleaning up her yard and fixing broken plumbing.

Now, 6 Stones and other communities in the Euless area (which is near Dallas in Texas, USA) are encouraging home owners to apply for the “fall blitz” scheduled for early October.

“We are very thankful,” Sanchez said. “I can go out in my yard again and take care of my plants. I am very grateful to the volunteers.” Nora, who often takes her mother to medical appointments, said the home repair programme is a godsend for her family. “We were out there working with the volunteers,” Sanchez said. “We were excited to have the extra hands and get things done.”

Brian Cramer, director of community-powered resources for 6 Stones, said home owners who meet income guidelines can apply for help. The residents are screened, and volunteers meet with them to determine their needs, he said.

Cramer said home owners who apply often have circumstances such as caring for children with special needs or widowhood. Often they put off maintenance, he said.

“This is hidden poverty. You don’t often see it unless you drive down a street and see that a house needs work,” he said. Home owners in need “are right in our neighbourhoods, and you don’t know it,” Cramer said.

Scott Sheppard, executive director of 6 Stones, said the non-profit, which relies on a network of volunteers, corporations and towns to repair homes, said the mission is all about “the village coming together to take care of the village.”

Other cities are looking to 6 Stones as a model, and the organisation will soon expand, he said. Officials said that working with the faith-based non-profit is a rewarding experience, and that the repair work results in a domino effect to improve neighbourhoods.

The programme began in Euless in 2008 and spread to the nearby Texas towns of Hurst and Bedford.

Ken Rawlinson, an investigator for the Euless Fire Department who also chairs the community revitalisation committee in Euless, said about 300 homes have been repaired in the three cities. “We recognised more than just prettier properties through the repairs, but dozens and dozens of families with restored hope,” Rawlinson said in an e-mail.

Deputy Bedford City Manager David Miller said he has seen similar results.

Ashleigh Johnson, a spokeswoman for Hurst, said the community-powered revitalisation brings a “domino effect to neighbourhoods.” The city also has an employee giving day in the spring so that it can help the 6 Stones volunteers with repairs. About 100 homes have been repaired in Hurst, she said.

Meanwhile, Nora said she plans to volunteer during the fall blitz. “It’s a good feeling to help others,” she said. “We need to pass it forward and do a little if we can to volunteer.” – MCT Information Services

Star-Telegram

Crossing America in a 1949 Hudson

Posted Monday, Sep. 22, 2014

BY GORDON DICKSON

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EULESS — As public golf courses go, Texas Star in Euless is a pretty swanky place. So it might have seemed a bit unusual for passers-by to see the equivalent of an old rust bucket — a 1949 Hudson — parked at the course's front entrance Monday.

The historical vehicle belongs to Dan McNichol, a Boston man who has logged more than 12,000 miles traveling the United States to draw attention to the national need for more investment in highways, bridges and other transportation structures.

For McNichol, who on Monday addressed about 100 people as part of a Texas Good Roads and Transportation Association meeting, the '49 Hudson represents a lot of what's good and what's bad about America these days.

Driving the Hudson reminds McNichol not only of the joy of traveling America's highways and byways, but also the incredible work that went into making the U.S. infrastructure the envy of the world. He is particularly fond of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's emphasis on building an interstate highway system.

But the Hudson, its fenders crumbling with rust, is a reminder of how far infrastructure has crumbled during the past couple of decades because improvements haven't been funded.

"We have to do more," said McNichol. Citing the 2007 collapse of the Interstate 35W bridge in Minneapolis, McNichol added, "That bridge severed Texas from Canada. That bridge blocked the Mississippi River."

He stressed that he believes Texas is a leader in transportation investment. His appearance on Monday was a joint effort by Texas Good Roads, CASE Construction

Equipment and ASCO Equipment to show public support for Proposition 1, a proposed constitutional amendment that voters statewide will consider Nov. 4.

Early voting begins Oct. 20.

If approved by voters, Proposition 1 would set aside a portion of the state's oil and gas revenues for road and bridge improvements — an estimated \$1.7 billion in the first year, and roughly \$1.2 billion a year on average in future years.

The proposal is seen as an alternative to issuing more debt to pay for roads. The state is already \$23 billion in the red for roads built since 2001, and unless the Legislature approves new debt instruments has no other bonding capacity.

McNichol, who is working on a book about his tour of the U.S., said he and a business partner bought the Hudson on Ebay for \$2,500 — and when they retrieved it from a barn in upstate New York, the vehicle had only 30,000 miles on it.

“That interior is the original mohair,” he said.

Several elected officials attended Monday's event, which is part of a tour billed as “Dire States” by CASE Construction Equipment.

Among them was state Rep. Stephanie Klick, R-Fort Worth, who noted how difficult it was during a previous legislative session to persuade rural lawmakers to allow Proposition 1 to be put on the ballot. Some lawmakers from less populated areas didn't see how increasing transportation funding would benefit their hometowns.

“On transportation issues, it's amazing to me how difficult it is to cobble together a coalition and get something done,” she said.

Lawrence Olsen, executive vice president of Texas Good Roads, said that without support from Klick and other new, conservative lawmakers, “we wouldn't be talking about Proposition 1.”