

## **‘A bounce in my step’**

**Marsha Davenport: Dickson, Tennessee**

*By Phillip Jordan*

Back during the first weekend of May, Women Build volunteers in Dickson, Tennessee, planned to help Marsha Davenport finish her new Habitat house.

Instead, May 1-2 brought nearly 13 inches of rain to Dickson, and historic flooding throughout Middle Tennessee. Twenty-one people drowned in the raging waters covering Tennessee; 10 others died in the same storm system in Mississippi and Kentucky.

In Dickson, the floodwaters claimed the basement of Davenport’s mother’s house—where Davenport, 62, had been staying while her house was being built.

“I had a relative come over and use a Shop-Vac down there,” she says. “Had to empty it nine times. But that’s nothing. I know people who had their houses ruined by this water.”

Fortunately, Davenport’s nearly completed Habitat home didn’t suffer much damage. And she was shocked by how soon Habitat staff and volunteers trudged through the mud to help finish the tasks that remained. On May 9, just a week after the rain began, a group of Women Build volunteers spent Mother’s Day helping finish work on Davenport’s new home.



“Some of those volunteers and Habitat staff were back working on my house when they still had problems with their own homes after the flood!” Davenport marvels. “That just says a lot about the kind of people here.

“You can’t comprehend it until you experience it. It just means so much. You hear people say: ‘Thank you just doesn’t do it.’ And now I get it. Thank you really doesn’t seem like enough.”

Polio damaged Davenport’s right leg when she was a child, making it difficult for her to navigate the steps and worn-out floor in the single-wide trailer she used to call home. At the Mother’s Day dedication ceremony, Davenport shared how much the new house meant to her, and she did so with typical humor.

“There’s a bounce in my step today,” she said. “And I mean that literally. It isn’t that my walking is improving. It’s that this new floor isn’t sagging!”

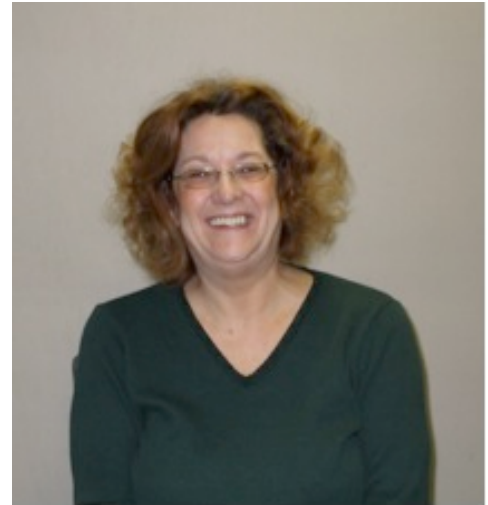
Davenport said her trailer’s floor wasn’t only uneven—it had many holes in it, too, allowing birds, cats, raccoons and possums to all invade her living space.

“It’s like the word was out among the animals: ‘Want to get warm? Go to Marsha’s!’” she joked. “It was like an animal sanctuary. I thought maybe I could charge for a petting zoo.”

“Marsha is a wonderful lady,” says Chris Greene, director of Nashville Area Habitat’s Dickson Division. “She exemplifies that attitude that not only is she not going to overcome, but she is going to have a positive attitude and uplift others, too. She’s a real role model.”

Throughout the building process, Davenport says she kept her Habitat house’s floor plans in the front of her Bible. “I wanted this to go well,” she says with a laugh.

She helped ensure it would, too. Davenport assisted on site throughout the build, thanks to some training from local Lowe’s employees. Lowe’s sponsors National Women Build Week in the United States, and offers training clinics to Habitat’s Women Build groups.



“Lowe’s has been great,” Davenport said. “One evening they took time for a bunch of us women to learn the tools we’d be using on the build site. I appreciated that they seemed to really get into the spirit of Habitat. They really cared about supporting us.”

Thanks to the help of many, she knows she can now live comfortably near her family. In addition to her mother, Davenport also has her daughter, Charlotte, who lives in Dickson, too.

This community is important to Davenport, who has lived here since 1979. Until recently, Davenport worked two jobs here: a full-time position at a local hospital, and part-time at a weekly Dickson radio show hosted by Dr. Jimmy Jackson. Two local churches, including her own, recently gave her a Lowe’s gift certificate for a washer and dryer.

Davenport knows she is also part of the Habitat community now. Davenport says she was inspired by a volunteer at her house named Roxanne Cox. Cox moved into a Habitat home in 2008, and has helped on every Habitat house built in Dickson since then.

“She’s got her own house and teenaged boys and a full-time job,” Davenport says. “But she came to help the whole time, every build opportunity and the dedication.”

“It’s easy to lay back once you get a house, but I don’t want to do that. Habitat is for this whole community. Look how much better the area is now with my new home. I want to keep helping with this.”

*To learn more about Nashville Area Habitat, visit [www.habitatnashville.org](http://www.habitatnashville.org). In response to the May 2010 flood—in addition to new-home construction—Nashville Area Habitat is also offering low- and moderate-income homeowners in Davidson and Dickson Counties zero-interest loans for home repairs and home-safety improvements.*