

Rebuilding Together Peninsula changes lives in Pacifica

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In 2001, longtime Pacificans, husband and wife Lars and Jennifer (not their real names), found themselves in a situation which took them by complete surprise.

Jennifer had worked in financial services for 26 years and Lars had worked in the computer industry for 26 years. Both were laid off within months of each other. "And we were not exactly in our twenties!" they laughed.

"Prior to losing our jobs, we were in the process of doing some work on our home," Jennifer said. "So we put those projects on hold, including repairing the areas that we gutted and went about the process of looking for work." In their early fifties, the couple struggled in their job searches. Loss of work was followed by some medical issues and Jennifer ended up requiring a number of surgeries, one of which kept her in the hospital for many months. Her husband moved into her hospital room as well.

"At one point Jennifer's medical issues literally became life and death," Lars said.

"And to put it mildly, life and death costs money," Jennifer laughed. "There was a time when I thought — dying would be so much cheaper and easier!" Now in a better place physically, the couple still struggles with finances and have been unable to take care of any home repairs for the past 10 years.

"Last year we read your Pacifica Tribune article on the extraordinary organization, Rebuilding Together," Jennifer said. "And so we wrote them about our home repair wishes,

and following their very stream-lined and kind application process, our requests were granted."

"It is the kind-of thing we would have volunteered for in different times but life through us a curve ball," Lars said. "And now we are on the receiving end."

Rebuilding Together Peninsula, www.rebuildingtogetherpeninsula.org, is a local affiliate of the national Rebuilding Together network, which had its beginnings in Midland, Texas in April of 1973 when neighbors came to the aid of neighbors in need of home repairs. Originally called "Christmas in April," the mission of Rebuilding Together is to bring volunteers and communities together, joined by local affiliate leaders, to repair and restore houses and nonprofit facilities so as to improve the homes and lives of low-income homeowners and to revitalize entire communities — at no cost to the recipient. In 1988, Christmas in April went nationwide and in 2000 the name was changed to Rebuilding Together to increase awareness of the organization's year-round efforts.

This year, on Saturday, April 30, Rebuilding Together Peninsula (RTP) will bring volunteers and affiliate leaders together to work on 72 Peninsula projects and/or 3,500 volunteers are expected to do repairs worth over \$2,500,000.

Pacifican Bob O'Donnell, retired Daly City deputy fire chief, is the local volunteer contact for RTP.

"It is important to get the message of Rebuilding Together out to the community to build awareness of the program, elicit support and volunteers and inform potential new needy homeowners of our work," O'Donnell said.

There are five projects in Pacifica bringing in volunteers from St. Peter Catholic Church, St. Andrew Presbyterian, and New Life Christian Fellowship (all in Pacifica), along with Pacifica firefighters, Lowe's, DPR Construction and the Peninsula Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers.

Pacifica Firefighter Capt. Eddy Horodenski out of Linda Mar Fire Station 72 will be the volunteer captain for Jennifer and Lars' home project. This is his fourth year with Rebuilding Together. A fireman for 14 years and a paramedic for 20 years, Horodenski said he has his reasons for volunteering with RTP.

"Because it puts a big smile on my face and I want to see people smile," Horodenski said. "Jennifer and Lars, they don't want to ask any favors but they need help and it's the right thing to do." Horodenski has requested eight volunteers for this project.

"The Rebuilding Together people do all the background work to make this project happen, which is huge. And also a special thanks needs to go to Angelica and Steve from Lowe's of San Bruno who have been incredibly generous with their support." The following key repairs will be made at the Lars/Jennifer home — garage door replacement, new back door, fence repairs, finishing off the work that was gutted, removal of worn carpeting, window repair/replacement, kitchen plumbing, sink/faucet replacement and some work will be done to support Jennifer's ongoing medical issues.

"We are so pleased to be able to do our work in Pacifica," said Seana O'Shaughnessy, executive director, RTP. "For many years we had trouble securing the resources and volunteers needed to make our project happen in the northern coastal region of San Mateo County. But key community partners like Bob O'Donnell, Paul Vian, Bill Provence, Eddy Horodenski, Andy Sloan, Angelica Beas and The Woodlawn Foundation have led the charge to make our work possible. We can't thank them enough." How can someone volunteer to help RTP in Pacifica?

"Contact Megan Corning, Volunteer Coordinator," said Kate Comfort Harr, Development Director, RTP. "Megan can be reached at 650-366-6597 X230 or at megan@RebuildingTogetherPeninsula.org." Homeowners Jennifer and Lars said they feel very humbled by the many who have made it clear that they are so happy to be of help to the couple.

"Over the years we have tried to help people as we can," Jennifer said. "And now people are helping us." "It won't be forever," Lars said, "But we are very fortunate that we are able to stay in our home and look out to all the beauty that is the community of Pacifica."