



Sheds of Hope volunteers commemorate building their 100th shed and gather beneath a poster of Psalm 100: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands...." Volunteers pictured include, front row, from left, Tom Schultz, John Meyer, Steve Larson; back row, from left, Dick Forrester, Arn Ditmar, Jerry Sheppard, Kent Schumacker, Dick Unger, Ron Dickerson, Mark Stott.

Sheds of Hope

How a simple shed is transformed
into a temple of treasure

■ Story by T. Michael Stone ■ Photos contributed

A catastrophic storm has turned your community into little more than a pile of rubble. You and your neighbors face a long road to recovery as the rebuilding process begins. In the meantime, you have no place to store your most prized possessions, the items that give what remains of your unsettled life meaning and hope.



Sheds of Hope team assembling sheds in Tennessee for disaster victims.

That's where the Sheds of HOPE ministry steps in.

In the wake of a hurricane, a tornado outbreak, flooding or other natural disaster, the Sheds of HOPE ministry operated by the Lake Oconee Presbyterian Church is ready to help facilitate the delivery of storage sheds to disaster victims so will they have a secure and dry space to store salvaged belongings.

According to the church's Sheds of HOPE program director Dick Forrester, the completed kits are typically shipped to the MNA Disaster Response program's warehouse in Rome, Georgia, where they are weather proofed and held in readiness to be shipped out to future disaster areas. (There is a second warehouse in Dallas and the Presbyterian Church of America hopes to add another in Orlando in the near future).

Sometimes when a disaster

response is underway, the kits are shipped directly to the disaster area where other volunteers will deliver and assemble the Sheds of HOPE for families affected by the disaster, so they will have a secure and dry space to store salvaged belongings.

“What we have found is that families, especially in a tornado situation, may have been able to save quite a few belongings, but they have no place to put them,” Forrester says. “Disaster response people have discovered that if people can have their belongings close at hand, it accelerates their recovery from a disaster.”

The sheds are 8x8x8-foot wood buildings with floors made of treated lumber and plywood. The walls are made of 2x4-inch studs and LP Siding.

The initial cost of a Shed of Hope is about \$1,100.

A Shed of HOPE may be delivered and put up by volunteers from some other place, but the Lake Oconee Presbyterian Church is responsible for follow up with families who receive shed kits built there.

Six months after the shed is installed, a team from LOPC will arrive to check on it and, in the process, a relationship is often built with families affected by disasters.

“We’ve found that people want to tell their stories,” Forrester says.

Six months later the team will follow up again, this time with buckets of paint and hardware to help maintain the shed, and maybe



Dick Forrester, Steve Larson, and Brent Johansen in front of a storage shed of building materials.



Dick Forrester supervises a shed build.

a picnic basket full of sandwiches.

Forrester says the church was blessed to have the leadership and mentoring offered by John Brown, a native of Northern Ireland, who was instrumental in keeping the program going during some difficult times. Sadly, Brown passed away while working at the Dallas facility but his church friends at LOPC have soldiered on.

"By determination and stubbornness, we are probably the longest surviving shed kit building church in our denomination," Forrester says.

As part of its effort to get youth involved, The Sheds of HOPE ministry built a relationship with the Construction Arts class and teacher Ransom Braswell at Putnam County High School.

"Three or four of us went up there and mentored," says Brent Johansen, one of the LOPC volunteers. "We showed them what to do and they did a great job. It was pretty inspirational."

The Sigma Chi fraternity at the Georgia Institute of Technology has also gotten involved through the Rome facility as a community service project.

"We have a lot of fun building sheds," Forrester says. "And word gets around. We've got a much tighter group of men in our church because of this program. When you get to be our age, you kind of wonder if your chance to make a difference has passed. And we found out we can still make a difference."

"I would not underestimate at all the benefit to the men working together for a single purpose, enjoying each other and everybody contributing," says Steve Larson, another LOPC volunteer.

Forrester says the church is trying to reach out to the local community and invites anyone interested to grab a hammer or a drill and join in the fun.

LOPC began in the mid '90s

with services held in the living room of a founding member. The church congregation grew and later moved to a storefront location before acquiring the property the current church – which was built in 2003 – now occupies near the corner of Scott Road and Greensboro Road.

Last year, the church was renovated inside and out to better serve its congregation with many upgrades put in place for young families and children.

The Sheds of Hope ministry uses the pavilion next door to the church as its shed kit assembly area, but Forrester says the recent installation of pickle ball courts and other recreational activities nearby will eventually make it necessary to find a separate location where the sheds can be built.

Forrester says a sister church in Tennessee was able to acquire a defunct grocery store that it now uses for kit assembly. But a tin barn would suffice, Forrester says. “It has to have electricity and lights, and it would be nice if it had heat, but that’s not entirely necessary.”

In the meantime, the Sheds of HOPE ministry will be back at work on kits this spring with its first build beginning on March 25. More builds will take place in April, May, September, October and November.

So, take a moment to look around your home and inventory the items that mean the most to you. What would it mean to you to lose those things or have them damaged because you did not have a safe and secure place to store them?

The sheds of HOPE ministry’s mission is to help those dealing with just such unpleasant circumstances.

More information is available at www.shedsofhope.com or by contacting LOPC at 706-484-0600. You can also contact Dick Forrester by email dhforrester@icloud.com. ❖



Above and below, Sheds of Hope volunteers work in an assembly line to maximize efforts.

