

# Contractors rally to aid fellow homebuilder in Buckingham



Posted: Sunday, July 6, 2014 12:15 am | Updated: 8:29 am, Mon Jul 7, 2014. By Crissa Shoemaker DeBree Staff writer

## Helping hands

The Homebuilders Association of Bucks-Montgomery Counties is once again helping one of its own. This time, its local contractor Gregg Bittner and his wife Sherri and their family. Bittner has MS, and the disease has forced him to stop working. He and his wife had intended to rehab a home they own in Doylestown, but his illness has gotten in the way. So his fellow homebuilders have stepped in to complete the project for them.

Gregg Bittner is the type of guy who goes the extra mile to help people who need it.

A well-known area homebuilder, he completed one woman's home at no additional cost after her husband died. Subcontractors knew he could be counted on to provide work, and even advance pay if they were desperate.

Those same contractors are now rallying around Bittner and his family to complete a project he's too ill to do himself.

Bittner, 53, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1999. While he was able to continue working in the early stages of the disease, today he's mostly confined to a wheelchair. He built his last home in 2008.

The Home Builders Association of Bucks and Montgomery Counties is leading an effort to renovate a home for the Bittner family in Buckingham. Plans call for demolishing an existing home on Fell Road and building a new, handicapped accessible home that will allow Gregg Bittner to regain some of his freedom.

"We have a lot of resources to pull together, whether it's donations of labor or time or connections," said association member Rick Buchholz, director of land acquisition for K. Hovnanian Homes. "We felt we could rebuild the house for him."



Sherri Bittner said her husband began exhibiting symptoms in 1991, but it wasn't until 1999 that he was officially diagnosed with MS, an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system.

Traditional therapies helped control the disease, and Gregg Bittner continued to work. By late 2005, however, his condition worsened. Doctors began treating him with antibiotics, suspecting he also had Lyme disease.

Sherri Bittner said her husband improved — antibiotics have been shown in some studies to also help slow the progression of MS — but by 2009 his health plummeted once again.

"I came home from work one day and he was completely paralyzed on his left side," Sherri Bittner said. "I had to put him in a blanket to get him in the car and get him to the hospital."

Gregg Bittner now receives monthly intravenous treatments and takes oral medications, which have helped stall the progression of the disease. Sherri Bittner is hopeful that one day they'll find treatment that will reverse some of the symptoms.

"I always have hope," she said. "I believe all things are possible. Will he be 100 percent? I don't know. But can we keep him at 85 percent or 90 percent, where he can enjoy life and do the daily functions everybody does?"

Last week the Bittner's, who have three grown children — Kirsten, 27, Gregg, 25, and Ian, 22 — sold their home on Ridgeview Drive in Buckingham. It was no longer safe for Gregg, and financially the family couldn't keep it, Sherri Bittner said. They've been relying on equity from the home for the past several years to support Gregg's medical treatments. They'll stay with family and friends until their new home is completed.

Gregg Bittner has owned the home on Fell Drive in Buckingham since about 2000. He offered it to people who needed short-term rentals while they waited for their new homes to be completed, and at one time planned to build a new home on the property, his wife said.

The Bittners' sons attempted to renovate the home themselves, and called on Buchholz, a longtime family friend, for advice. After viewing the poor state of the home, however, Buchholz recommended that they demolish it and rebuild on top of the existing foundation.

"Gregg did the same thing for me when I was rebuilding my house," Buchholz said. "Gregg was there whenever I needed him to help, whether it was advice, or labor, or sending contractors when I got stuck."

Buchholz called upon the Home Builders Association of Bucks and Montgomery Counties, which has a foundation that performs charitable works related to housing needs.

Two years ago, HBA members helped another fellow contractor, Jim Alfieri, by donating time and material to renovate a home for his family. Alfieri is paralyzed from Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. The association is also raising money to cover medical expenses for Tom and Betty Doyle, who were shot last year while driving through Virginia. Tom Doyle worked for DeLuca Homes.

"One of our own is in need here," Buchholz said. "This guy's a builder, and we're a builders' association. What's easier to do than to help our own people?"

The HBA has launched a fundraising campaign and is documenting the progress of the Bittners' new home online at [FriendsofGregg.org](http://FriendsofGregg.org).

The project would cost about \$175,000 to build, Buchholz said, but he expects to have at least half of the material and most of the labor donated by association members. More than a dozen contractors — many of whom have worked with Gregg Bittner in the past — have already pledged their help, he said.

Sherri Bittner is overwhelmed by the generosity

"I was trying to handle it alone," she said through tears. "I was pretty lost as to what to do. And then we were approached by Rick to see if he could do anything to help out. It's completely beyond what I thought would happen. It was overwhelming and extremely humbling to know that Gregg has been granted this charitable award. I could never do this for Gregg."

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