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Group helps with home repairs

Church teams up with businesses

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Deborah Witherspoon, second from left, is presented a \$5,500 grant created to revitalize the east side of Columbia. Presenting Witherspoon with the grant are, from left, First Farmers and Merchants Bank's Paul Butts, first vice president, and Harvey Church, Maury County president; Christa Martin, Columbia city councilwoman; The Rev. Kenny Anderson, Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist; and Maury Hills Church of Christ minister Russ Adcox and member Jan Wright. Staff photo by Susan W. Thurman

A group of business and religious leaders have joined together to help revitalize Columbia's east side.

Jan Kirk Wright, who is helping organize the group that calls itself People Helping People, said the organization grew out of a desire to help the community.

The group has begun by helping residents repair their homes.

"We want to slowly, one house at a time, change the world," Wright said.

Wright said she would like to see the program expand and bring in other community groups.

Wright said the Maury Hills Church of Christ had recently completed a project for Habitat for Humanity and wanted to continue the service to the community.

She said a member told their minister Russ Adcox about a woman with a roof in disrepair.

When Adcox announced before the congregation that the woman needed help, donations began to pour in immediately, Wright said.

"We collected \$3,000 that first day," she said. "By Tuesday she had a new roof on her house."

Fellow real-estate agent Jim Kitchen joined in to help with the next project, Wright said.

The group fixed the roof on another woman's home and will be adding siding to the residence as well.

"She is a single mother who is helping put her son through (Tennessee State University)," Kitchen said.

Kitchen secured financial aid from First Farmers and Merchants Bank to pay for the repairs.

Both Kitchen and Wright said progress starts within a community and they are just there to help.

"This all begins in the community, nothing can happen without their support," Kitchen said.

Wright said she has spoken with other area religious leaders and some have expressed the desire to help.

"There's just doors opening like you wouldn't believe," Wright said.

Although her group will begin by focusing on the east side of Columbia, Wright said her dream was for the organization to grow and spread across the state.

Columbia officials have recently begun a revitalization project for the East Hill and College Hill areas. The city has received more than half a million dollars to demolish dilapidated houses thanks to the federal stimulus plan.

But Kitchen said the government can't and shouldn't be the prime motivator in the area. He said residents will have to determine the direction the revitalization would take and he hopes other business and community leaders will pitch in to help.

Wright said she will continue her efforts because the work is close to her heart.

"I have a passion for this," Wright said.