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Groups fund house repairs

Bank, church donate to cause

By WILLIAM BOWERS
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A group formed to help rehabilitate homes in east Columbia has received state aid in addition to local support.

Jim Kitchen, a local businessman who helped start People Helping People, said First Farmers and Merchants Bank has donated \$30,000 to repair homes in the area. Maury Hills Church is donating an additional \$3,000 to the project.

"We've got 11 houses approved for us to do," he said.

Kitchen said the group has already helped restore four houses and work has begun on another nine. Kitchen said the state, through the Tennessee Housing Development Agency, will match local donated funds for low income home owners.

"If people qualify then we put in \$3 and (the state) puts in \$6," Kitchen said. "That will be a tremendous return for people who want to contribute."

The South Central Tennessee Workforce Alliance determines who qualifies for the state aid. Kitchen said even if home owners don't qualify for state matching funds, People Helping People would still try and repair their homes if funds were available.

The group has spent an average of \$9,000 to repair each home to date, Kitchen said.

Kitchen said the group's goal is to set up a Web site which would allow people to contribute over the Internet.

"This is just the beginning," he said.

Since forming the group in 2009, Kitchen said he has been overwhelmed by the response of Columbia residents and businesses.

Ace Hardware has donated mailboxes for the homes, he said. Others have donated materials and time to help repair the homes. Kitchen said People Helping People works with area churches to clean up east-side homes as part of Columbia's overall effort to revitalize the area. He said several individuals have made donations since hearing about the group's work.

"People are just coming out of the woodwork," Kitchen said.

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