

Paula Prince knows what it's like to rely on others. Since becoming wheelchair bound as a teen she had not been able to live on her own. That all changed in August when Prince and her 14 year old son, Grayson, moved into their own home built by Heart and Hand Ministries and volunteer work teams this summer.

Prince's parents' home, where they had been living, is somewhat accessible but far from ideal. She'd tried to work with other agencies to get an elevator put on the front of the house, but time and again it didn't work out.



Prince saw an article last year about Heart and Hand's home construction program and decided to apply. She felt that if she had seen the information a few years earlier, she would not have had the courage to even apply.

But "God cares about the details," she said. She owned property in Philippi with access to water, sewer and electric; she could pay a reduced mortgage and taxes; and she met the income guidelines; all stipulations in the Heart and Hand construction program. "This is the perfect time in my life for this to happen."

While waiting to hear whether she'd been accepted, winter came with excessive amounts of snow, keeping her inside the house for about three months. At that point she became anxious for something to work out.

"I kept trying to fix the problems myself," Prince said. "But I was blessed by waiting. I just kept praying for it to work out."

Slowly, things did begin to work out, however the steep Walnut Street lot that Prince owned presented significant accessibility obstacles. After a year of exploring building options, a volunteer work team got excited about the challenge of building an elevator that allowed for new design considerations. Doward Matlick of Sunrise Construction stepped forward to dig out the foundation for the steep lot.

"Sunrise Construction's service was the key to being able to build on that property and to keep the project going," said Mike Miller with Heart and Hand and organizer of the construction project. "Then many local and regional groups were able to come in and lay the foundation and complete the house."

Being in a wheelchair for many years and living in different homes, Prince knew what she needed and understood what was important in gaining her independence. She said, "It seemed to energize the crews, having to figure out different problems. They were determined to make it good for me."

Now being on her own with her son, Prince is excited to make her own decisions, and sometimes live with the consequences, as well as teaching her son responsibility and caring for property. Though independent, she is not without support. Her pastors live two houses down in one direction and her parents are two doors down in the other direction.

“This has been overwhelmingly wonderful,” Prince said. “I never believed that I could own my own home!”

Heart and Hand Ministries is a non-profit mission project affiliated with the United Methodist Church providing emergency assistance to the residents of Barbour County. Ministry programs include a food pantry; a home repair and construction program; assistance with utilities, rent, and certain medical expenses; providing layettes for newborn babies; and operating a garden market and two thrift stores. Guidelines and applications for the home repair and construction programs can be found online at www.heartandhandhouse.org.

-Heidi McHugh