

Lowe's Heroes make a stop in San Jacinto



Christian Pompa, left, and his father John work on the front yard at EXCEED's Casa del Valle in San Jacinto, Saturday, Jan. 27. Valley News/Diane A. Rhodes photo

Diane A. Rhodes
Special to Valley News

The Lowe's Heroes program is designed to reflect the company's focus on building and improving the communities where team members live and work. It has partnered with EXCEED, a non-profit organization that has been providing services to adults with disabilities since 1981. Along with community employment services and training center programs, EXCEED also has a 14-bed residential facility in San Jacinto that provides long-term housing, care, and training for adults with developmental disabilities.

Jeanine Hartert, who has been with Lowe's for 20 years, works at the Flatbed Distribution Center in Beaumont, where she serves as operations assistant manager. She said each location is granted an amount of funds to help improve their community after determining where it will have the most impact.

"We navigate to find a nonprofit organization and once we find one we are interested in, I contact them to set up a meeting to discuss our program and their needs. Once we have made a decision on who we would like to partner with, we plan an onsite meeting to get a greater idea and understanding of what they will need to help improve their facility," Hartert said. "We submit all the information to our community relations team within Lowe's and once approved, they give us the spending limit and we go shop at a Lowe's store for the organization's wish list. We communicate the event to all our employees, set a date and hope we have a great turnout."

Hartert learned about EXCEED when Lowe's became an employer for some of its clients. It opened the door for her and others to learn more about the nonprofit

and what it does in and for the communities where it has operations. Orlando, who started at the EXCEED workshop in 2007, has worked at the Lowe's Regional Distribution Center in Perris for more than 14 years. He recently spoke at the California Disability Services Legislative Breakfast in Ontario.

"I was told I couldn't do things," Orlando said. "I wouldn't get anywhere in life, but I never stopped believing. If it weren't for EXCEED, I wouldn't be here. I want to thank EXCEED for believing in me and not giving up on me."

Although Hartert and her Lowe's Heroes team have partnered with EXCEED in past years, Saturday, Jan. 27, they brought equipment and volunteers to help replace ceiling fans, assemble an outdoor picnic table and patio chairs as well as improve the home's curb appeal by removing weeds and adding mulch to the front of the home. Also included in the day's activities were some minor repairs and replacement of outdoor solar flood lights. Earlier in the week a new washer and dryer were delivered as well as a huge box of janitorial supplies. Hartert said this year's project was granted a \$2,500 credit to shop at a Lowe's store for all the items needed to complete the wish list.

"I love being able to make a difference and make life a little easier for the ones who need it most," she said.

Sandra Aldridge, who handles marketing and resource development for EXCEED, was happy to see several EXCEED employees volunteer their time as well.

"This program is part of Lowe's charitable efforts to support nonprofit organizations in their communities and we are grateful to be a recipient," she said. "Lowe's He-

roes donated their time, expertise and items that our home needed."

Cliff Brown, who is location manager at the Flatbed Distribution Center, has worked at Lowe's for the past eight years. He used his expertise with power tools to assist with the installation of the ceiling fans.

"It's a very good company and I like that we can do projects like this," he said. "They really care about people."

Pedro Zambrano, who has been with EXCEED for 36 years, is the program director who oversees all the licensed programs including the Sack's Thrift Avenue store in San Jacinto where several clients work. He spent the morning taking down the old ceiling fans with dim lights from the dining and living rooms so they could be replaced.

"Lowe's has always been really helpful whenever needed," he said.

The multigenerational residents range from their 20s to over 60 years of age with four who have lived there since it opened about 20 years ago. He said having them see this type of support from the community helps them be proud of their home.

Zambrano was one of about eight EXCEED employees who donated their time to help with the various projects. Ivar Johnson of Cherry Valley has been working at the nonprofit for about a year as a vocational trainer who advocates for clients and meets with employers and supervisors for possible placements. He spent the morning working with fellow vocational trainer Ruby Solis assembling the outdoor picnic benches and table. Solis focuses on job coaching and advocates for clients to ensure all their accommodations are being met. She volunteered her Saturday morning to the project to be more involved and felt it was a good way to help the community.



A new washing machine was among the donated items delivered to Casa del Valle Monday, Jan. 22, as part of the Lowe's Heroes program. Valley News/Courtesy photo



Ivar Johnson and Ruby Solis, both vocational trainers for EXCEED, assemble a picnic table donated by the Lowe's Heroes program. Valley News/Diane A. Rhodes photo



The Lowe's Heroes program partnered with the nonprofit EXCEED to make much-needed improvements to its residential facility in San Jacinto with, from left, Cliff Brown of Lowe's, Sandra Aldridge and Executive Director Lee Trisler with EXCEED and Jeanine Hartert from Lowe's. Valley News/Diane A. Rhodes photo

John Pompa of Hemet and his two sons volunteered for yard work. Working for the organization's IT department, Pompa said he fully supports all of the programs and felt it was his duty to help out. He said his sons have natural green thumbs so working on beautifying the front yard seemed like a perfect place to start. Christian, 10, said he and his brother Angel, 19, planted a little garden at their home and it has flourished with lots of edible produce.

Hartert said she already has ideas for future projects that will further improve the home's outdoor space.

"We like to help them because we know they need so much," she said, pointing out that with the amount of residents living there everything is exposed to more than

the average wear and tear leading to repairs and replacements more often.

EXCEED's purpose is to provide advocacy, training and support services primarily to adults with developmental disabilities. These services are individually designed to reflect participant choice and promote independence.

Lowe's is committed to making homes and hometowns better for all. Over the past 100 years, Lowe's has grown from a small-town hardware store in North Carolina to one of the largest home improvement retailers in the world. The company's heritage puts the communities it serves at the heart of everything it does.

For more information, visit <https://weexceed.org> and <https://corporate.lowes.com/our-responsibilities>.



Cliff Brown assesses the location before installing a new ceiling fan in the dining room at EXCEED's 14-bed residential facility in San Jacinto. Valley News/Diane A. Rhodes photo



Angel Pompa of Hemet volunteers with yard work during the Lowe's Heroes project in San Jacinto Saturday, Jan. 27. Valley News/Diane A. Rhodes photo