

Tammy Douglas and Jerome Moore with Alexandria, LeAnthony, and Jonathan.

Home for the Holidays

A young family benefits from the spirit of giving.

by MARILYN SADLER

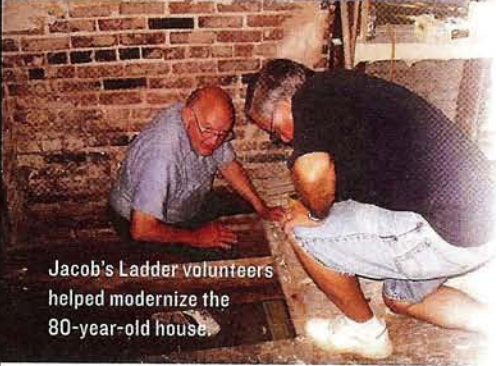
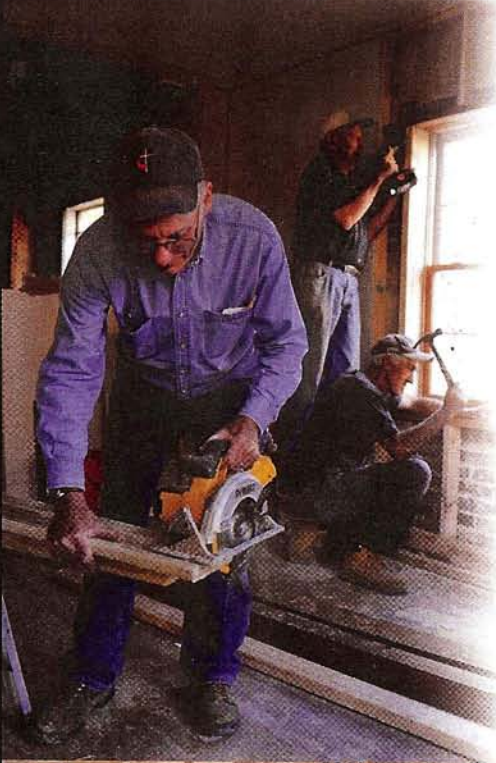
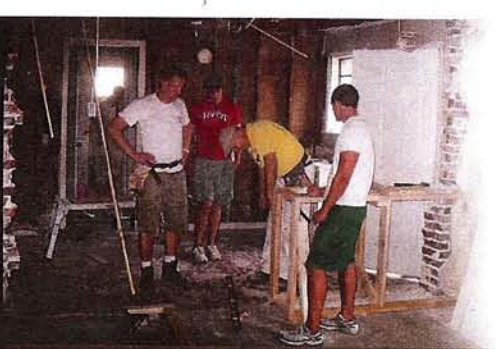
WHEN CATHI JOHNSON heard about a family in need of a house, and a house in need of an overhaul, she knew how she could help. She organized members of her church, CrossRoads United Methodist, to donate their home-repair skills to fix or replace rotting rafters and sloping floors. "But I knew we could go beyond the bones of the house," says Johnson, who works for Memphis Theological Seminary. "Not everyone could

swing a hammer, but we have members who could collect furniture, donate towels, hang shower curtains, anything the residents might need. We want toothbrushes in the bathroom and paper towels in the kitchen."

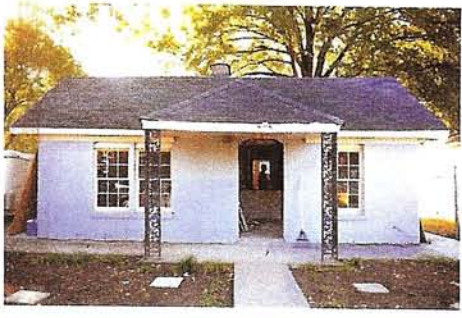
And by Christmas — thanks to several church groups, volunteers, and businesses coordinated by Jacob's Ladder Community Development Corporation — the house and many items that help make it a home

will be ready for its new owners: Jerome Moore, Tammy Douglas, and her three children. "We heard [at the end of September] that this would be ours," says Douglas. "We are really excited. We'd been living in a duplex, so this will give us more room," she adds of the 800-square-foot house with three bedrooms and one bath.

Reverend Bill Marler and his wife Lana founded Jacob's Ladder in 2004 to partner with the low-income Beltline community south of the Fairgrounds. Marler has worked with churches and other volunteer groups to totally rehab or repair some 35 homes in the area. The current house was donated to Jacob's Ladder by Wells Fargo. "They found our website on Google and



Jacob's Ladder volunteers helped modernize the 80-year-old house.



"The model of home and neighborhood-building as we see it starts with building relationships."

— Reverend Bill Marler

water." Marler also discovered that the home's original plaster was applied right over the exterior brick, with no insulation between. He had workers who could install two-by-fours, insulation, and sheet rock, thus making the house more comfortable and energy-efficient.

In defining Jacob's Ladder CDC's approach to neighborhood stabilization, Marler says, "[It's not] fixing up a house, then giving somebody a key and an axe to tear it down. And that can happen if the owners never had a house before. The model of home and neighborhood-building as we see it starts with building relationships." He tells of a couple two doors down who had a lush garden in the summer. "That belonged to Edwin and Patricia Grimes," says Marler. "He came to meet me and said his daughter, Tammy Douglas, needed a home and he wanted to get her involved in the neighborhood."

Grimes was already keeping his daughter's children after school while she worked at Cash America Pawn. "And he'd keep an eye on the neighborhood too," says Marler. "He, his wife, and other neighbors would mow the grass and watch the property and let us know if they saw anything going on that shouldn't."

In addition to relationships, the Jacob's Ladder CDC model also stresses training in home ownership and money management. During a 24-month rent-to-own period, new residents must meet monthly with a credit counselor, pay their note on time, attend neighborhood festivals, and assist with other building events. Jacob's Ladder representatives will guide the homeowners-in-training in their care of the home, help them set priorities, and protect them from taking on additional mortgages on the house. The organization will also set aside \$50 from the residents'

rent to set up a contingency fund for repairs or emergencies.

From September through November, volunteers from CrossRoads UMC — as well as Emmanuel UMC, Epiphany Lutheran, and several other groups — made extensive repairs, painted the exterior, and removed trees in the backyard. They tilled a garden area and Grimes came down and planted turnip greens. A resident across the street gave them a good deal on cutting tree limbs away from the house and utility wires. Businesses made donations of goods and services, including concrete and the labor to pour it. Wells Fargo has promised \$6,000 in rehab funding. CrossRoads and other churches have collected money and "all kinds of things for the house," says Johnson. Depending on when the family moves in, a group from the church will be ready "to stock the pantry, and bring in furniture and decorations." A volunteer interior decorator has a scale model of rooms showing where each piece of donated furniture will fit.

On a late October afternoon, the soon-to-be residents stood in the yard and watched as men measured and sawed, sanded and hammered. Earlier that week, the boys — Jonathan and LeAnthony, ages 12 and 11, who attend Airways Middle School — tried their hand with a paintbrush on the exterior bricks. The girl — Alexandria, 5, nicknamed "Bug" by her brothers — dashed and darted around the yard, face beaming, pigtails flying. She's hoping for a pink room with *lots* of teddy bears.

"So many people have donated their time, skills, and money to this," says Johnson of CrossRoads UMC, who at this writing says the rehab is still a work in progress. "But we're almost there. And it's been really exciting to share in this transformation." **M**



gave us five properties," says Marler. "This one is right in the heart of our ministry."

He believes several factors make this renovation unique. "The property is similar to many inner-city houses in that the rooms are boxy," Marler explains. "So we've tried to remove that boxiness and create better flow and give it a more updated look." For example, a wall between the living room and kitchen became a half wall that serves as countertop where kids can sit to eat or do homework. Also, workers removed from the small kitchen a huge water heater that dominated the space. Today, tucked under the kitchen sink is an on-demand water heater. "It's out of the way and out of sight," says Marler, "and it's not heating 24/7; just when you turn on the hot