

SummerServe gets people involved

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Young people ages 11 to 17 are spending the summer using their hands and their energy to help needy people, animals and the environment.

Volunteer Frederick's SummerServe, in its 14th year, has spread more than 50 of these pre-teens and teenagers around Frederick County to do everything from planting trees to insulating attics.

Volunteers were working Thursday with energy auditors from Atlas Home Energy Solutions. They were insulating a home on Linden Avenue owned by Community Living. Some were stuffing gray insulation material into a machine to be pumped into the attic; others were in the attic spreading the insulation.

The insulation is made of ground-up newspapers with a flame-retardant solution. All 27 bags of insulation were pumped into the attic floor.

The work was hot and dirty. Randi Dollar, 12, emerged from the attic with her dark hair and eyelashes covered in specks of gray insulation. She said she was having fun.

Mike Uecker, of Atlas, said his goal is to teach the kids the basics of home energy audits. The insulation being used is made of 85 percent recycled material.

Mark Gambriel, 16, of Monrovia, will be a junior at Urbana High School this fall. But he has spent this summer and the past four summers volunteering with SummerServe. "This is a hobby that I do," he said. "I volunteer all year round." He also has a part-time job, but said volunteering is fun. He spent Thursday morning stuffing insulation into the pump.

Rebecca Robinson supervises the SummerServe youngsters doing the home energy audits, which are called Energy Action House Calls. "We try to mix up the activities," she said. Participants are also insulating pipes and water heaters, and weatherizing attics. They are exchanging incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs.

SummerServe participants are doing home energy audits on 20 Community Living homes around Frederick. "This is wonderful for us," said Sarah Matthews, outreach coordinator for Community Living, which provides group homes for disabled adults.

Many of the homes were built in the 1950s, '60s and '70s and are maintained, but energy audits will help the organization save money on heating and cooling bills, Matthews said. The homes will also use less electricity, gas and oil.

Participants can choose different activities each day. SummerServe Express students, who volunteer for two weeks, were spending Thursday doing farm chores at Days End Farm Horse Rescue near Mount Airy.

Other SummerServe participants do work at HorseNet, a smaller horse rescue between New Market and Mount Airy.

SummerServe participants recently planted 50 trees on farmland along Glade Creek to create erosion control and a barrier for fertilizer. The Maryland Environmental Trust awarded Volunteer Frederick a grant to help pay for some of the plants.

They also planted 42 trees along Fishing Creek in Catoctin Mountain Park. The park is attempting to increase the shade along Fishing Creek to make the creek more habitable for brook trout, said Stacey White, youth services director for SummerServe.

This year, 33 youngsters are participating in the five-week SummerServe program, with 17 others in SummerServe Express. Each day, each participant can choose where he or she wants to go.

There is a preschool program for the children who live at Carver Apartments, one of the City of Frederick's housing projects. Next week, participants will do a tree planting at Mountainside Retreat Center in Urbana. Volunteers can also help organize Kids on the Block puppet shows.

After five or so hours of work each weekday, the youngsters get treated to a swim at a local pool or another fun activity.

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