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Charity home making believers in Bethany

By Ryan Saxton
Staff Reporter

Summertime beach homes and family fun have always gone hand in hand, but this season, one Bethany Beach house is about to become even more welcoming than many could have ever expected.

A small beach cottage on Third Street in Bethany has become the newest addition to the Believe in Tomorrow National Children's Foundation, a nonprofit organization that has provided the country's first pediatric retreat facilities for children suffering from serious illness.

These retreats instill families with an assurance, comfort and renewed spirits. More than 300,000 overnight accommodations have already given children and their families this hope.

The Bethany house, built in the 1960's and owned by Chevy Chase, Md., residents Norman and Marjorie Wollberg, was recently put on the market. For decades, it served as a beach get-away for the Wollbergs' family and friends.

Michael Glick, who purchased the home on June 4 this year, played with the idea of using the house this summer before tearing it down and rebuilding one in its place this fall. And with a little guidance from the organization's founder and CEO, Brian Morrison, and Director of Development for the Believe in Tomorrow Foundation Maryanne Davis, it will be turned into a vacation spot this summer for those who truly need it most.

Since Believe in Tomorrow started in 1982 as a volunteer effort to help critically ill children at Johns Hopkins Children Center and University of Maryland hospitals, Morrison said it has made a difference in his life.

"Something like this really opens up your eyes," he said. "We don't really realize that it's the little things that make such a huge impact in peoples' lives. A summer visit to the beach is something we take for granted."

By 1986, the foundation's Beach Retreat Program began, helping families visit the shore when they are struggling through financial and emotional hardships. A condominium in Ocean City and the Believe in Tomorrow Home in Fenwick Island now serve as permanent pediatric retreat facilities.

With recent conflict in the Middle East, Morrison soon realized that there were others out there who could use some structure and encouragement.

"We've had an initiative to serve military pediatrics," said Morrison. "They've had a difficult road to go down. They're lacking the support system that they really need. There's always the hardship of being deployed."

In several cases, husbands and fathers have been deployed while their wives were left to care for a child —



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From left, Wayne Littleton, Maryanne Davis, Pamela Adkins and Brian Morrison stand in front of the Third Street home in Bethany Beach.

sometimes two or more — who are fighting his or her own battle, be it cancer or another life-threatening illnesses.

The Delaware shore can provide as a perfect location to which these families can escape. “Generally, families wouldn’t have the opportunity to come down [to the beach] in the summer,” said Pamela Adkins, a Realtor with the Leslie Kopp Group at Long and Foster in Bethany, who helped to find the charity house. “They’d have to be really flexible and would likely have to worry about several cancellations, with their schedule.”

Local businesses have offered their time and services to refinish the home. J.C. Scotts furniture donated fittings throughout the home. Brasure’s Pest Control provided free treatment inside and out of the house, while Brasure’s Carpet completed an entire cleaning throughout the house at no charge. Mill Outlet permitted any necessary household items, to be taken at no cost, as well. Fenwick Hardware donated \$250 in store credit to the charity for other supplies that may be needed.

“It was a little rough around the edges, but it’s coming together,” Adkins added. She and her family have also donated furniture, window treatments and accessories to help spruce up the interior.

Bushes were trimmed back, power washers went to work and the interior was cleaned, top to bottom, for a like-new appearance. “Once you get the homes organized, they start to fall into place,” said Wayne Littleton, who runs the organization’s Ocean City and Fenwick Island homes. “The hard part is getting them ready, but it’s a great feeling when people show up.”

Weeks may go into preparing for a family’s stay, but it comes down to the little things that make the end result such a success.

“We put together welcome baskets for each of the families that come down,” said Davis. “We try to customize the homes for each person, too. It helps to make it more welcoming. Every time a new family walks through the door, they’re always impressed. Almost all of the time, it exceeds their expectations, and that’s an incredible feeling, knowing how happy you made someone.”

With finishing touches being placed inside and outside the home, the project anticipates its first beachgoers to be in this weekend.

“Bethany is a great little town,” said Adkins, who lives in the area with husband Andrew and four sons, “and you can get a lot of volunteers and support. Sometimes, you may even end up with more help than you expected. This project is only for a summer, too, so you’re not really asking anyone to commit themselves to something for too long. Here, families can be close to the beach, but out of the hustle and bustle of it all.”

In the past decade, the foundation has designed and built the Believe in Tomorrow House at St. Casimir and on Wisp Mountain in the Allegheny Mountains, as well as a home in the mountains outside of Asheville, N.C. Several more hospital and retreat facilities are scheduled to open in the next three years.

Morrison’s next plan for Believe in Tomorrow is a project to establish a year-round, beach location and serve as a major retreat facility expansion.

“Believe in Tomorrow pushes the edge in the ability to entertain families,” he said. “It’s an enormous effort with a phenomenal product.”

For more information about Believe in Tomorrow or to find out how to contribute donations, visit their Web site at www.believeintomorrow.org or call their office at (410) 744-1032 or toll-free at (800) 933-5470.

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