

## **Habitat Homeowner-In-Progress: Tom Saunders**

For the last 21 years, Thomas Saunders, 69, has lived in a single-bedroom apartment, sharing all common space with at least three other men at New Covenant Fellowship Church's Jacob House.

Today, though, he is preparing for a new future as a Habitat homeowner as he works through his 300 hours of sweat equity – the next step on a journey that he's been traveling since returning from a tour in Vietnam with the US Army after deciding that college wasn't for him.

Saunders said that he returned from Vietnam he was a mess and that for much of the next 30 years he was an alcoholic and heroin addict. Still, he said, he and his wife – also an addict – managed to raise a family in their home in West Grove, Penn. And it was that family, specifically his daughter, that ultimately saved him.

He explained that his daughter had been going to a school where two of her teachers were involved in a ministry that had helped both her and his son become saved, and that for two years they prayed for him and his recovery.

“When she would come talk to me, I'd listen,” he said. “God was working on my heart, but I didn't even know it then.”

It was then on Christmas Eve in 1997 that his daughter asked him to go for a walk and suggested that he go to a recovery program in Goldsboro, NC, where her teachers were pastors at New Covenant Fellowship Church.

And so he did. And after spending a little more than a year in the program, he began to work as an intern helping others through the same program, and that's where he's been ever since – serving in that ministry and working at Food Lion, currently at the Ash Street location.



***Tom Saunders does sweat equity, painting inside another homeowner's house. Now as Habitat prepares to start on his, he says he can feel the anticipation growing.***

“It’s been a journey,” he said. “The Lord’s been speaking to me to step out and so I was looking for a place of my own when I learned about Habitat from the Veteran Services Office on Ash Street. I’d never thought about Habitat before”

But, he said, the more he reflected on it, the more he realized he was being led to this opportunity. He explained that when he was a teenager, his parents had taken part in a Self Help program in Pennsylvania in which they and 14 other families built each other’s homes – a similar model to Habitat.

“The Lord’s been leading me in this,” he said. “Having a home of my own, it’s going to give me a feeling of maturity to live on my own. And I’m sure the Lord is going to use this in some kind of way. The house just happens to be part of that.”

Plus, he added, he’s excited about being able to have his children and grandchildren come visit and stay with him, something they haven’t been able to do in years.