

Home Depot crew helps spruce up Cancer Support Center

BY MARILYN THOMAS

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A generous \$10,000 gift and plenty of free labor on July 1 helped transform spaces at the Cancer Support Center.

Johnny Alva, store manager of the Homewood Home Depot, 17845 Halsted St., brought 45 volunteers with him for a day's worth of work at the Cancer Support Center's Homewood location, 2028 Elm Road.

Throughout the morning and early afternoon, as rain clouds hovered above, the crews worked to trim trees, plant shrubs and colorful flowers provided by vendors Hampshire Farms and Grand Flowers, build planters and assemble a gazebo. As they finished their projects, they rolled out outdoor carpeting and set new lawn furniture in place at the northeast corner of the building.

Indoors, Luis Banuelos was busy installing new vinyl flooring in the center's Kids Room.

The weather delayed the volunteers' plans to paint the east wall of the building, but Alva said they would be back another day to give the building a new coat of paint and install new shutters.

"We're really excited to give back and



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

Homewood's Home Depot provided a generous gift and many employee volunteers to help transform this space at the Cancer Support Center into a beautiful patio addition.

one of the best things the company allows us to do is to give back to the community," he said. "That's part of our values."

Alva said he chose to partner with the Cancer Support Center at the suggestion of staff and customers.

Sue Armato, director of the Cancer Support Center, said she couldn't thank Home

Depot and the volunteers enough for their generosity. She said her first contact with Alva was in fall 2021 when he presented her with a \$1,000 gift card. He relayed that staff members wanted to give back to the Cancer Support Center because they had family who benefitted from its programs.

Early this year, Alva again contacted

Armato and asked about doing a major project at the center. Her first thought was improving the landscaping around the building.

She said she told Alva about her dream to revamp the outdoor space for use for yoga, Zumba and art classes. The space was a kind of dead zone. Staff had ideas for how to use it, but as a not-for-profit organization with limited resources it was a plan waiting to happen.

Alva used his own imagination in coming up with plans for the space. He would spend \$10,000 buying the furnishings, building planters to mark off the space from the parking lot, and getting the space looking like a little retreat area, in addition to the landscaping improvements around the building.

When Armato said she'd like to paint the walls, Alva said he could do that, too.

"He has just been this incredible partner where he sees a need and offers to make it a beautiful space," Armato said.

Homewood employee Amy Grutatowski has worked at the store for about a year. This was her first volunteer project and an introduction to the Cancer Support Center.

"A few years ago, when I was going through cancer, I didn't even know places like this existed," she said.



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