



United Way
of Bradley County

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Allen Mincey, Communications
(423) 472-9876 (office)
(423) 339-1110 (fax)
Email: allen.mincey@unitedway.org

Bank employees become painters to help at Harbor Safe House

Several volunteers from the Cleveland branches of BB&T Bank recently moved briefly from banking transactions to house painting, all to help a worthy cause.

Through the bank's "Lighthouse Project," 20 BB&T employees helped at the Harbor Safe House, a safe haven for victims of spousal abuse that is part of the Family Resource Agency's Family Violence Program. It is also a United Way of Bradley County funded agency.

"BB&T did a project this year called the 'Lighthouse Project' where they allocated funds to every region within BB&T's footprint to help others," explained Melissa Finnell, BB&T Vice President and Financial Center Leader III.

Finnell said that she contacted Michael Cole of the United Way of Bradley County to see if there was a United Way agency that needed extra assistance, but not just monetary assistance.

"This was not just a project where we just donated money. We did have funds to use, but it was more of a community project where our employees were involved doing the work," she said.

Cole discussed the project with several United Way agencies. Angie Faulkner, director of the Family Violence Program, responded.

"We have a real need to have the Harbor Safe House painted, and woodchips for the playground," Faulkner said.

The Harbor Safe House provides a safe place and services for individuals and their children who are victims of domestic violence.

"We need to have our house painted frequently because we have a lot of wear and tear there because there are so many people in and out," Faulkner said. She said that in 2009, between 150 and 200 women and their children stayed at the house for some length of time.

Faulkner said that with the issues that these victims are already dealing with, being in a safe haven that makes them feel at home is essential, and the help provided by the BB&T volunteers makes it a much nicer place to stay.

"I think it makes them feel better," she said, "and one of the things that I've always wanted to do is to have the house be very homey and be somewhere they can relax."

Finnell said that while the BB&T group did the painting, many at the Harbor Safe House assisted as they could, including helping to move furniture and take things off the walls.

"Everyone we encountered at the house was very appreciative," she said. "Our group, which included many who had never painted before in their life, enjoyed it too because we all knew it was for a good cause."

While there, the BB&T folks had the opportunity to talk to the ladies who were at the Harbor Safe House, and learn more about the program and what led them to be there.

"One funny thing that happened was that one of the ladies there said, 'you know, I really need a job, so call me if you're hiring'," Finnell said. "She thought we were painters, so I said 'I'm sorry ma'am. We don't paint for a living. We're bankers'.

"She thought we were a painting crew, but then she said, 'well, I thought you were too pretty to be painters'," Finnell smiled.

Faulkner said due to the nature of the program, the painters inside the home were all women, while the men volunteers from BB&T spent their time working on the home's playground area.

BB&T volunteers who helped included Finnell, Lynn Baker, John Bryan, Courtney Burke, Jane Chavis, Lori Cox, Mary Duncan, Jimmie Dunn, Michael Estes, Kathleen Frappier, Cory Gates, Kim Hampton, Kristin Holmes, Pam Lance, Cheryl Rose, Devra Sharpe, Sandy Swallows, Amy Tinsley and Teri Wade.

Cole said that he was glad that BB&T was able to work with the Harbor Safe House on this project.

“They went above and beyond just merely doing a (United Way) campaign and making donations to support our agencies. They actually went to the agency’s property and did some hands-on work,” he said. “I believe that this brings an awareness of the agency and also a realization of where their money is going from the campaign. They see their donations helping a real place with real people in need.”

Finnell agreed. “When I announced the project to our staff, they didn’t have a clue what the Harbor Safe House was. I did because I have been involved with United Way for many years, but I didn’t know everything about it, so I learned a lot, too.”

She said that she hopes BB&T can help in a similar fashion again in the future, and hopes that other companies in Cleveland and Bradley County will look for volunteer opportunities like this.

“It was an undertaking and it seemed that the house grew every time we were working, but we were more than happy to do something that we know is going to help the community, and especially those in need,” Finnell said.

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BB&T HELPS HARBOR SAFE HOUSE – Volunteers from BB&T Bank recently helped by painting the interior at the Harbor Safe House. From left are: (front) Michael Cole of United Way of Bradley County; Melissa Finnell, Kathleen Frappier, Amy Tinsley and Lori Cox of BB&T; and Angie Faulkner of the Family Violence Program/Harbor Safe House; (back) John Bryan, Kim Hampton, Cory Gates and Michael Estes of BB&T.