

GOOD NEWS

Calgary-based non-profit Hearts and Hammers selects rare disease sufferer and wife for home renovation

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FIRST POSTED: TUESDAY, JUNE 24, 2014 04:28 PM MDT | UPDATED: TUESDAY, JUNE 24, 2014 04:48 PM MDT



Dave Bonk from Hearts and Hammers at his office in Calgary, Alta. on Tuesday June 24, 2014. Hearts and Hammers is proud to announce their first family of 2014 to receive a home renovation, Ramon and Naomi Ramirez. Ramon has been diagnosed with a disease so uncommon that only eight other individuals in Canada have been observed by doctors to have similar symptoms. This rare disease has not yet been formally given a name. Over the past 24 months this disease has left Ramon unable to speak and with limited mobility. Stuart Dryden/Calgary Sun/QMI Agency

Calloused hands, sweat-covered brows, full hearts.

Hearts and Hammers, a Calgary-based non-profit that aims to improve the living situation for people facing accessibility issues in their own homes, has dipped into last year's batch of candidates for its first renovation project of 2014.

Dave Bonk, president and founder of Hearts and Hammers, said the first of two jobs chosen for 2014 — to upgrade the Pineridge home of Ramon and Naomi Ramirez — was beyond the capabilities of the society in its inaugural year.

“They were nominated in 2013 and were one of the finalists but the project was just too big,” he said.

“But we never forgot about them.”

Ramon suffers from a disease so rare it doesn't have a name, with only eight others in Canada diagnosed with similar symptoms.

To say those symptoms are debilitating doesn't do it justice.

Ramon, who has suffered with the disease over the last two years, has been left unable to speak and with very limited mobility.

With the Ramirez' unable to afford to make the home wheelchair accessible, Bonk said Naomi has to tie a rope to her husband to pull him up and down the stairs of their split level northeast home.

"She's working hard and her nursing job and taking care of him as well — it's hard," Bonk said.

"It's a big job and we're committing to do at least the minimum to have their home be accessible and we're hoping to do a whole lot more than that."

The renovation, which will include lifts and ramps and whatever other upgrades are needed, is slated to cost about \$100,000 and will be underway within the next two months.

However, the society is hoping donations of time, materials and cash will help get the life-changing reno done as quickly as possible.

Bonk said a second recipient for 2014's slate of renovation's will be chosen later in the year.

For more information or to help the cause, contact Hearts and Hammers at 403-808-5998 or visit the website at heart sandhammers.ca

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