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Above Jack Tennison (center) of First Baptist Church in Seguin, demonstrates the proper way to use a power planer to Harry Stallings and Loyd Ervin.

Above left: John Rushing of New Braunfels applies glue to a board, while Melvin Warren of Waco works on a large board that will become the side of a chest.

Left: Lora Morris of Clarksville, Ark., works alongside Texas volunteers to make dresses for orphan children in Juarez, Mexico.

(Kent Harville Photos)

Furniture builders make a case for volunteerism

By Sara Horn

LifeWay Christian Resources

GLORIETA, N.M.-Next time you visit LifeWay Conference Center at Glorieta, look carefully at any new furniture in the rooms. There's a good chance it was built by Texas Baptist Men.

A group of more than 40 Texas Baptist Men and wives currently are on a two-month assignment at the New Mexico conference center, building more than 230 pieces of furniture, including bunk beds, headboards, dressers and desks.

Power saws whine and sawdust flies as the retired men work quickly through their list of projects.

The wood is provided, but the volunteers bring everything else—the tools, the labor and a servant attitude.

This year, they're working in the basement of one of Glorieta's cabins, which also serves as their headquarters. The women work upstairs, sewing and crafting child-size clothing, quilts and blankets for an orphanage in Juarez, Mexico.

“I've always liked the fine precision work and craftsmanship” it takes to make furniture, said Jack Tennison, who was a math professor and department chair at Texas Lutheran College for 25 years before retiring. Tennison is responsible for coordinating the volunteers.

He and his wife, Kathryn, are members of First Baptist Church of Seguin. They have participated in Texas Baptist Men projects with the camp building ministry since 1994. Tennison first thought of creating a furniture ministry in 1996 after a mission trip to Canada, where he helped build office furniture for a seminary.

The group has traveled widely across the United States, Canada and Texas. They've built more than 3,000 pieces of furniture, Tennison said.

The couple sold their home six years ago and now travel full time in an RV.

“You meet such wonderful people,” Mrs. Tennison said.

“You really feel like your life is worthwhile doing something that's helping people,” said Narlene Copel, a member of First Baptist Church of Mount Pleasant, as she sat behind a sewing machine working on a little girl's jumper. “Instead of sitting home and twiddling your thumbs, you can work where you're needed.”

The furniture and sewing ministry is ideal for Copel and her husband. She previously owned a fabric store, and her husband is a retired forester whose hobby is woodworking.

The churches where the volunteers attend often donate supplies such as tools and fabric.

“This is all for the Lord,” Tennison said. “He's the reason we're here. When I leave a job, I leave it to the Lord's hands, and let him use it however he wishes.”

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