

Furniture ministry in Kingsport

'I never dreamed so many people were sleeping on the floors'



Volunteers unload a desk for a Kingsport family. From left to right: Joe Stras, John Isenberg, Earl Galloway, Keith Clanin.

Story and photos by Annette Bender

Earl Galloway is driving a truck, loaded with furniture and mattresses for the Kingsport families who request them. He's talking about how he transferred from another church to First Broad Street United Methodist Church, simply because he wanted to be involved in ministries like this.

"I've had a wonderful life and have been blessed, and I want to give something back," Galloway says. "I think all of us feel that way here. We want to help others."

The participants in First Broad Street's furniture ministry sure seem to feel that way. On Tuesdays, the mostly retired men tackle their volunteer jobs as if their paychecks depended upon it. They wrestle mattresses up narrow apartment stairs, grunt and strain while assembling bed frames, hoist sofas as if their backs were 40 years younger.

The used furniture is largely donated by church and community members, while most mattresses are donated new by local companies. Last year, 353 families received assistance from First Broad Street's highly organized ministry. While Galloway and his co-workers deliver and pick up, another crew stays back in the warehouse, repairing washing machines or sorting linen.

Typical beneficiaries include victims of house fires, displaced persons, or people moving from shelters to government housing. Galloway is most touched by the single mothers, who "almost always cry" when beds are delivered for their children.

"I'll tell you. I worked 39 years for Eastman, and I thought I knew a lot about Kingsport," he said. "But I never dreamed that so many people were sleeping on the floors." ■



Back at the warehouse, Bob Dorr (above, left) and Al Stone repair donated washers and dryers.



After every delivery, Joe Stras (above, right) asks if he can share a word of prayer for the home and its residents.



Earl Galloway (above, left) gives a New Testament to a woman who has just received a bed frame and mattress for her grandson.