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# Home repair volunteer honored

## Leon West helps those whom 'society oftentimes forgets'

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At first glance, it's hard to compare Wilmington's Leon West with the host of television's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.

West, 75, is about 30 years older than the show's host, and his organization - Wilmington Area Rebuilding Ministry - operates on a fraction of the television show's multimillion-dollar budget to fix up homes.

While there are no cameras filming West's work, WARM and the Extreme Makeover Team do have something in common - both groups are dedicated to repairing the homes of people in need.

As project manager of WARM, West has overseen the repair of about 335 homes of low-income residents in Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover and Pender counties in the past 10 years.

West was recently selected to receive an N.C. Outstanding Volunteer Medallion, an award that honors 20 volunteers from various counties around the state.

West was recognized for his work with WARM, an organization he helped found in 1997 to assist low-income homeowners who cannot afford to make needed repairs to their homes.

"It's an honor and I appreciate it, but being recognized is something I never thought about personally," West said. "I do this to help a part of society that society oftentimes forgets."

West and the other founding members of WARM saw a need for this organization



Leon West(cq), a Project Coordinator with Wilmington Area Rebuilding Ministry sits in front of a home he is currently working on in Leland Thursday, November 1, 2007. West recently received the Governor's Medallion of Honor for his volunteer efforts with the organization. Staff Photo By Matt Born/Wilmington Star-News.

after seeing the damage to homes caused by Hurricanes Fran and Bertha in 1996.

"I was helping repair people's homes damaged by the storm when I saw that a lot of these repairs needed to be done before the hurricane," West said.

West, a retiree, used the skills he learned working in the life insurance industry and applied them to serving as WARM's project manager, a position he still holds.

West interviews WARM's clients, assesses their repair costs and assembles a group of volunteers to get the job done.

He also gets many groups involved to provide manpower and funding for their projects.

West's work is something that Stacy Bryn, administrative assistant for WARM, said helps keep the organization running.

"We couldn't do the things we do without his help," said Bryn, who has been working with WARM for the past five years. "We often wish we could clone him."

WARM has repaired almost 40 homes this year, West said.

In addition to serving as project manager, West also pitches in with construction, he said.

"I grew up on a farm with a saw in my hand and a hammer in another, so I know a thing or two about fixing things," West said.

As a recipient of the state medallion, West became the first person in New Hanover County to receive such an honor, said Annie Anthony, director of the Cape Fear Volunteer Center.

Twenty volunteer medallion recipients are chosen from nominations from 100 counties around the state.

"We're thrilled for Leon. He's a most deserving person," said Anthony, whose organization honored West last month with a governor's award and nominated him for the state medallion. "WARM does a lot of good for the community and they're sometimes an unsung hero so I'm proud they're finally being recognized."

West said the accolades are nice, but watching people who wouldn't normally be able to fix up their homes enjoy the repairs is the best part.

"It's just so rewarding to see people be so grateful for things that we do," West said.

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