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Volunteers build for Morristown senior women on Valentine's Day

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Valentine volunteers Charles Ritschel, left, and John Koch join co-workers from Newmark Associates putting the finishing touches on the \$1.5M renovation project that was completed last year at the Mt. Kemble Home, a historic landmark offering affordable housing to senior women in Morristown.

MORRISTOWN — Employees of a commercial real estate firm spent Valentine's Day morning giving back to their community, building bookcases and shelves at a home for senior women.

About 20 employees of Morristown's Newmark Associates volunteered their time at the Mount Kemble Home for Women, a program of Homeless Solutions. The workers spent Tuesday morning building the furniture, including an entertainment center for the recreation room and three bookcases for the library.

"These ladies like to read so there are a lot of books here. These shelves are really going to supplement that," said Tom Clark, director of housing for Homeless Solutions. "This seems like a great group of volunteers to get the job done."

The event was coordinated with the help of Caring Capital, a Morristown group that

connects corporate companies with their neighbors in need through volunteer projects.

"We wanted to find a cause that reflected the company's mission. When we realized we could connect a female-led company with a women's home and do something meaningful, it was a perfect fit," Caring Capital President Susie Schub. "Building the bookcases was perfect, because they wanted something that would make an impact, something the residents need, and Newmark wanted to do some hard work."

Homeless Solutions took over the Mount Kemble Home a few years ago and spent \$1.5 million to renovate the property, including new floors, a group kitchen, and remodeled rooms. The home currently houses 20 tenants, and the last two vacant rooms will be filled by the end of the month, Clark said.

Tenants of the home must be women over 62 years old. They must also fit into a lower income bracket, as the home seeks to provide affordable housing for area seniors. The average monthly rent is about \$300 including utilities, Clark said.



Valentine volunteer Pat Cunningham.



The historic Mt. Kiemble Home in Morristown, NJ.

The Newmark project will help put the finishing touches on the renovations, which were largely completed last year. “Our philosophy is relationships and service, and Valentine’s Day felt like an appropriate day to do this

for obvious reasons,” Newmark President Susanne Newmark said. “I don’t believe there is a separation between one’s work life and one’s personal life. The importance of giving back matters in all facets of one’s life.”

After a morning of volunteering, it was back to work for employees in the afternoon, but not before they decorated hearts to hang in the hallways of the Mt. Kemble home.

Schub said she was thrilled with the Newmark staff’s commitment to the project. “This was the most determined group I think we’ve worked with. (Building) challenging, large pieces of furniture, and participants never got discouraged or frustrated,” Schub said. “The finished console and bookcases look terrific.”

She also said it was the perfect way to celebrate Valentine’s Day. “It’s an opportunity to share the love,” Schub said. “Women helping women.”



Homeless Solutions Director of Housing Thomas M. Clark, left, Mt. Kemble Home Manager Elizabeth Johnson, middle, and volunteer Charles Ritschel.