

It's a new home for young people who are clients of the nonprofit Monroe Harding



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Piedmont Natural Gas in Nashville is used to doing good work. But there's one project that has employees really enthusiastic.

Tami Sturges had the idea. Instead of demolishing a house in the path of a natural gas pipeline project, she asked, could we do something productive with the house?



They got the work done. Quatrece McKinney, from left, Stephen Francescon, Leah Susi, kneeling, Tami Sturges.

The company bought the three-bedroom house in Nashville’s West End intending to demolish it. That’s when Stephen Francescon, Piedmont’s community relations manager, turned to Monroe Harding, a nonprofit that provides foster care and supportive housing for young people.

Of Francescon’s 13 years with Piedmont, he points to this project as a favorite. “It really struck a chord,” he said. “The employees love it, the good coming from this effort, and want to help.”

Piedmont provided the bed frames and mattresses, and the staff held a Stock the House drive over the summer, with employees donating a variety of goods, including a refrigerator.

Once outfitted, the house just needed tenants.

Deciding who moves in isn’t easy. “We have a process to try to make sure we’re mindful of neighbors, the community and the young adults,” said Quatrece McKinney, Monroe Harding’s senior director of housing and young adult reengagement.



Tami Sturges and Stephen Francescon of Piedmont Natural Gas and Quatrece McKinney and Leah Susi of Monroe Harding.

One resident, a 19-year-old woman, was affiliated with Monroe Harding’s Reengagement Hub that helps people ages 17 to 24 find education opportunities or employment. Another young woman recently joined her in the house.

“These are young adults living in neighborhoods like yours and mine who appear to be OK, but there are some missing pieces,” McKinney said. “We are helping them with unmet needs. We walk alongside them.”

Since Nashville State Community College is just down the road from the home, McKinney said, “Our dream was that there would be three NSCC college students who had been a part of our programs so we wouldn’t be seeking out anyone, rather people we serve who might be facing housing insecurity.”

Community colleges usually don’t offer students housing. The stability of the West End home provides these students time and security so that they can focus on school and create an exit plan.

“Even if it’s just one person who wants to go to school and make more of their life,” said Sturges, with Duke Energy’s property acquisition department. “Just to know that there are people out there

who care – that’s got to be huge.”

Monroe Harding staff check in regularly and help the residents learn to live autonomously. By charging a modest rent and helping tenants budget, they learn to problem solve. They also celebrate milestones, like landing a first job.

For the last four years, Piedmont has provided grant funding support, event sponsorships and even purchased beds and mattresses for Monroe Harding residents. In total, the company has contributed roughly \$20,000 since 2016, said Leah Susi, senior director of development and communications.

“People were proactive and aware of this opportunity and continue to do work outside of the norm to make it happen,” said Francescon, who has assembled beds and even cut the grass.

Of course, there were some speed bumps along the way. The legalities of the lease agreement, extra visits to the property, taking safety precautions at the house, and, since the pipeline will go in, this house is available only until May 2021.

“We could not have bought a house to do this,” McKinney said. “It’s short term, but as we continue forward eliminating housing insecurity for the young adults that we serve, I hope we learn a lot and start to partner with other organizations and businesses that can help us support these young people. That’s exciting.”