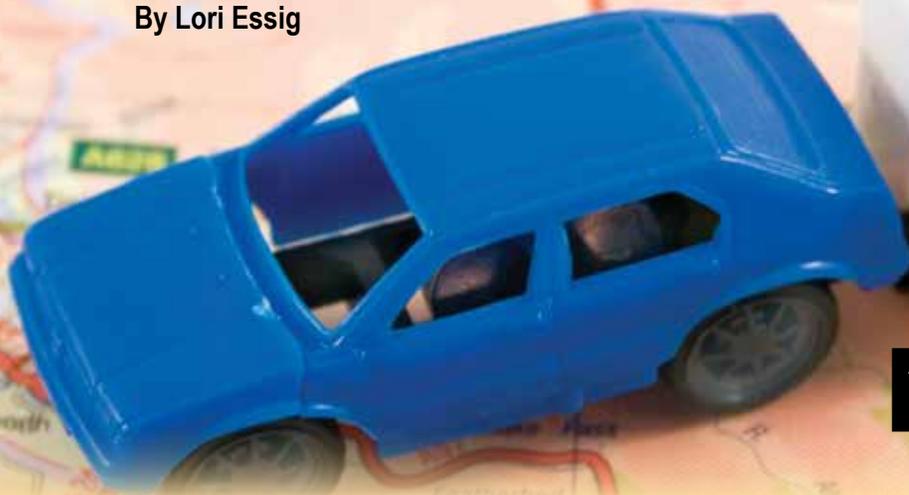


Have RV: Will Serve Others

By Lori Essig



wt feature

“It’s a pretty worthwhile way to spend your retirement.”

That’s how **CONNIE HOWARD** feels about her work with NOMADS – Nomads on a Mission Active in Divine Service. Since 2004, **Connie ’65**, a retired teacher, and her husband, **John**, have been participating in service projects throughout the United States. While they’ve mainly done winter projects in southern states, there are projects available year-round, all across the U.S.

NOMADS provides volunteer labor for United Methodist organizations. According to the organization’s website, NOMADS started in 1988 when some Midwesterners were wintering in Texas and decided they were bored. They reached out to local United Methodist churches to offer their services, and NOMADS was born. That year, 24 members completed five projects. In the last 28 years, NOMADS has grown to about 1,000 members doing 150 service projects each year.

The Howards say they began to plan trips around NOMADS projects, aiming for 10 to 12 weeks away from their Rapid City home during the coldest months of the year. They might do a three-week project in California, then spend a few weeks sightseeing and traveling to their next project, which lasts another three weeks.

“You know what NOMADS really stands for?” Connie asked. “Nice Old Methodists Avoiding Deep Snow.”

NOMADS are RVers – they must have an RV of some type to live in while they are working. Projects typically last for three weeks, and the United Methodist sponsoring organizations provide parking and hookups for the volunteers; the volunteers are responsible for all travel expenses, meals and other incidentals.

“We try not to go to the same place twice, though we have repeated a couple of sites,” Connie said. “We’ve worked projects in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, California, Arizona and South Dakota. Each place has its



Connie Howard '65

Serve Where You’re Called



John and Connie '65 Howard

tools, he prefers to bring his own so that he isn't caught without the right piece of equipment.

"And the deal is," joked Connie, "John loads all of his tools, and if there's room when he's done, I get to go along!"

The Howards say they don't often work with the same volunteers, and making new friends is part of the fun of being NOMADS.

"We have an easy camaraderie because we have a lot in common," John said. "We all have RVs, skills to share, a willingness to learn new skills, we're not afraid to get our hands dirty, and we have a desire to help others."

"We have made lifelong friends on these three-week projects," Connie added.

The Howards shared stories of some of their projects and the lessons learned.

In Brownsville, Texas, they worked on a home inhabited by a three-generation, all-female family. The home was in bad shape due to a termite infestation. One of the women, ill with cancer, was a devout Catholic who went to Mass each morning and told the volunteers that she always prayed for them.

Even though the family had little, they insisted on preparing a couple of meals for the NOMADS.

"The meals were delicious, but it was humbling to eat their food

special joys."

A typical week begins on Monday at 8 a.m. with devotions. The workday lasts until 4 p.m. with lunch and coffee breaks. The work week ends at 4 p.m. on Thursdays, so volunteers have three-day weekends for recreation, exploring and relaxing.

The work sites offer a range of work projects, from construction to office work.

"The rule is that if any job makes you uncomfortable or is beyond your ability, you don't do it," said Connie, whose jobs have included replacing the fluorescent light ballasts and bulbs in an office building, cutting up an old bathtub with a Sawzall, and lots of painting.

John, who is accustomed to working with hands-on projects, says that their 36-foot Winnebago Journey has "plenty of storage for tools." Although work sites provide supplies and sometimes a few



Serve Where You're Called



because we knew they did not have a lot to share," Connie said. "But we've learned that we have to allow those we are serving to give back to us if they wish."

In Dulac, La., another lesson learned involved accommodating the wishes of a homeowner, even when it didn't seem to make sense.

"We were working on a (Hurricane) Katrina-flooded home," John said. "Our job was to rip out the kitchen and replace everything. The homeowner insisted on saving and using the countertop – it was just a normal countertop, not unique, but special to them. So we installed the new cabinets and moved the old countertop back where it had been because that's what the homeowner wanted."

Connie recalled that Louisiana was also where the pastor served communion using oyster crackers and grapes.

"We usually have communion to celebrate the end of a project," she said. "Through our work we hear lots of faith stories, and that helps strengthen our own faith."

The Howards' commitment to service is integral to their lives; they participate in a variety of local volunteer projects. That commitment to serving others did not end when retirement began; it just took a new direction with the addition of NOMADS.

"We get more than we give," she said. "And even though we are retired, we still have a lot to give."



Mardel and Roger '59 Tanquist



David Hallett '59



Pearl Hallett



Lyn ex'56 and the late Donald '53 Rahn

Serve Where You're Called

ROGER '59 AND MARDEL

TANQUIST, of Bonney Lake, Wash., have been NOMADS for about 10 years and committed to their first three-week project in 2013. Since then, they've completed six NOMADS projects in California and Arizona, and they are scheduled for two more in 2017. On the Tanquists' first project in California, Connie and John Howard were the project leaders.

"John had a wonderful selection of tools, the use of which he shared generously," Roger said. "He sent me to the store in his truck to get some power tools that I've used on every project since then."

The Tanquists have also participated with Volunteers in Mission (VIM), a mission agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. Through VIM, they spent two three-month stints in Illinois and two months in Mexico. They also spent five years as volunteer lay pastors at Grand Coulee/Hartline (Wash.) UMC, and eight months as volunteer interim directors at Ocean Park (Wash.) United Methodist Camp.

"NOMADS projects provide opportunities to give back while experiencing new areas and working with fascinating people," said Roger.

DAVID '59 AND PEARL HALLETT,

of West St. Paul, Minn. (summer), and Fort Myers, Fla. (winter), have been involved in NOMADS since 2002.

"We saw a sign on an RV with the NOMADS logo, and since it was a UMC project, we inquired," David said. "We were looking for something to do in the winter in our RV. We have worked on nearly 20 projects from California to Florida. In most cases we felt like we were making a contribution to local communities and the people in those communities."

The Halletts worked three summer projects in Wisconsin cooking for volunteer staff at a day camp for handicapped children and their families. They also did a project with Roger and Mardel Tanquist at Storm Mountain UMC Camp in the Black Hills.

MARILYN "LYN" RAHN EX'56 and her

late husband, **DONALD '53**, were NOMADS from 1993 to 2004. They participated in three projects each year for a total of 33 from South Carolina to Arizona. They only repeated two locations during their NOMADS time.

The best part of the group, according to Lyn, was meeting people with a similar mindset about serving others. She also appreciated meeting the people who were helped.

"The satisfaction and pleasure we received from their gratitude was tremendous payment," Lyn said.