

Free siding a super gift for Dodge Nature Center

Cory Streeeter
Review staff

With around 20 buildings on the property of Dodge Nature Center in West St. Paul and Mendota Heights - some original from 1967 when the privately-funded nature center was founded - repairs are always needed.

But with a shoestring budget for capital improvements, often repairs get pushed back.

"Thirty thousand (dollars) doesn't go a long way when you have old buildings on a property, said Dave Napier, director of buildings and grounds. If a furnace goes out, there's little remainder, he added.

In steps Terry Stammen and his wife, Kristen, members at Dodge Nature Center who reside near the main property in West St. Paul with their two young children.

"We just wanted to do something good," Terry said.

So the Stammans did what they do best - their job - and offered to donate materials and labor to re-side the exterior of a building at the Dodge Nature Center.

The Stammans are owners of St. Paul-based Twin Cities Siding Professionals, a siding company they founded in 1996.

The offer was met with enthusiasm from the staff at Dodge.

"We have a lot of older buildings, and any time someone has a talent or skill and the ability, like Twin Cities Siding Professionals, to allocate resources to make it happen, and it doesn't cause us to redirect other investments to other areas, we're absolutely all on board," John Chandler, Dodge's development director, said.

"It's certainly not something that was even on our radar," Napier said. "To have them do it was just a great thing."

"And the opportunity to do maintenance and save dollars at the same time is invaluable," Chandler added.

From 'Partridge Family' to barn red

By May of this year, the siding and painting was completed on the schoolhouse, a building across from Dodge's main office.

Napier said the results



The schoolhouse at the Dodge Nature Center was completely redone during 2011, starting with the "Partridge Family school bus" version, and later the "barn red" version completed in May. Terry and Kristen Stammen, owners of Twin Cities Siding Professionals, donated the materials and labor for the project. The couple also plans to re-side two more Dodge buildings in the next two years for free.

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are great for two reasons: "One, an old building is sided, which helps with rodents because the siding had holes in it. And two, we were able to use material that would have ended up in a junk pile," which is educational by means of conservation.

Every year, the Stammen's company accumulates extra pieces of James Hardie plank siding from each project, called overage. And though it's all of the colors of the rainbow, it's perfectly good siding.

Before the crew painted the building, "it looked like a Partridge Family school bus," Terry said, laughing. He joked that there was talk among the crew about leaving the siding multicolored because it looked so cool, but it eventually was painted "barn red."

Energy efficiency has already improved because of the siding, Napier said.

Terry agreed, adding that the exterior is like an envelope, protecting the contents of the interior.

The siding clearly needed to be repaired, Terry said. "I didn't want to see Dodge tear down and have to rebuild for hundreds of



courtesy of Dodge Nature Center

thousands of dollars."

With the money saved on this project, Dodge "could use those funds to educate kids more about the beauty and wonder of nature," Terry said. He would know - he and his wife bring their two young sons to Dodge for summer camps, and for regular visits to teach them about the farm, attend festivals, and celebrate Halloween.

As the Stammans continue to bring their kids back to Dodge, they also plan to continue their gifts in the near future.

"As the project began and continued, we learned that they want

to do something like this every year. We're looking at doing quite a few buildings at Dodge in the next few years," Chandler said.

Terry said he plans to donate two future siding projects. He and Napier discussed re-siding the "rookery" and "museum and lab" - where the reptiles are housed - in 2012 and 2013.

Reliance on goodwill

As a private nature center, Dodge relies on both monetary contributions and donations of labor, such as the donation from Twin Cities Siding Professionals.

Closely linked to the

gift from the Stammans was one a half decade ago from United Products Corporation in St. Paul. Napier said the company offered up a few pallets of outstocked shingles to refurbish holy roofs around the properties.

"We were able to shingle a lot of buildings when we would not have had the resources to do it," he said.

Other companies have teams that come out regularly to work, such as the United Parcel Service and Target. Their tasks include construction to removing invasive species - that nasty buckthorn - from Dodge.

Target has restored and planted trees and fenced in pasture areas, Napier recalled.

UPS both bought materials and donated labor this past year for a pond renovation, Chandler added. "They were able to clear out a huge chunk of land. With that act, we have more access for children to leave the trails and discover what else is out there."

Overall, donations fuel to continued success of Dodge's educational programs and availability, staff says.

For the Stammans and Dodge Nature Center, the completed siding project - and future projects - is meant to create the best experience possible for visitors.

"It was kind of a neat project," Napier said. "And it was great for (the Stammans) to step up and approach us on it."

Napier said the nature center greatly appreciates the quality, renovated exterior it received.

The best part?

"We didn't have to pay a dime."

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