

Escambia County Wheelchair Ramp Program Helps Residents Maintain Independence

For 80-year-old Hoza Turner and his wife, JoAnn, getting in and out of their home has become a struggle. JoAnn receives dialysis treatment several times a week, and each time she has to leave the house, Hoza carefully helps her up and down their porch steps and in and out of her wheelchair.

But thanks to a brand-new wheelchair ramp recently installed through the Escambia County Wheelchair Ramp Program, getting in and out of their house just got much easier – and much safer.

“It will be a lot of help,” Hoza Turner said. “I don’t have to worry about trying to pick the wheelchair up and set it out there. I can roll it up and roll it right to the door.”

Turner said he’s especially glad to have the new wheelchair ramp after his wife recently fell when returning home from a dialysis appointment, and it was difficult for him to help her up.

The new ramp will provide Hoza and JoAnn Turner with safer, more direct access to their front porch, eliminating the need to transfer from the wheelchair and use the front steps.

Through the Wheelchair Ramp Program, eligible Escambia County residents can have a wheelchair ramp constructed for their home at no cost to them. The goal of the Wheelchair Ramp Program is to help Escambia County residents maintain independence and eliminate physical barriers by providing accessibility to their homes.

“Providing assistance to residents is at the core of our mission, so we’re proud to offer this program and help individuals regain safe access to their homes,” Escambia County Neighborhood Enterprise Division Manager Garrett Griffin said. “We hope to continue to expand this program and help even more residents maintain their independence through improved accessibility.”

"I'm very excited that we were able to help Mr. and Mrs. Turner access their home safely and more easily with their new wheelchair ramp," District 3 Commissioner Lumon May said. "I hope this new addition improves their

quality of life every day, and I look forward to continuing to assist residents of District 3 and throughout Escambia County through this great program."

Escambia County resident Charlotte Swearingen, age 77, also received assistance through the Wheelchair Ramp Program recently, with a new ramp and side porch constructed at her home.

After being hospitalized last year due to heart issues, Swearingen's doctors recommended that she make some improvements to her house to help minimize any potential fall risk, because even a minor fall could become a serious issue.

"Before I left the hospital, the heart doctors told me, 'You've got to get steps, you've got to get railings on your house so you have easy access, because of the way your heart is,'" Swearingen said. "They wanted me to be safe going out on my porch and exiting the porch."

Swearingen recalled that Escambia County had previously helped her and a neighbor with the removal of two dead trees that were a safety hazard, so she reached out to the county's Neighborhood Enterprise Division and District 4 Commissioner Robert Bender's Office to inquire about any other programs that may be available to help her restore safe access to her home.

"The Neighborhood Enterprise staff just kind of took over from there and told me what to do, and they had people reach out to me," Swearingen said of county staff. "It's been an amazing experience, how helpful everybody's been. I'm very impressed, and everybody is so great to work with."

"It is always rewarding anytime we are able to help a citizen who calls our office needing assistance, and this is a perfect example of connecting a citizen with exactly what they needed," District 4 Commissioner Robert Bender said. "Through the hard work and follow-through by county staff, I'm thrilled that we were able to provide Ms. Swearingen better access to her home and help her maintain independence through the Wheelchair Ramp Program."

Ever since Hurricane Sally damaged her front porch beyond repair, Swearingen had been using her side porch to enter and exit her home, which had stairs with only one handrail instead of two. As someone who has always been very independent, Swearingen said she's struggled with

having to slow down and focus on something as simple as going up and down a few stairs.

Swearingen said the new and improved access to her home was already necessary due to her heart issues; however, it also came at a perfect time because she is scheduled for hip replacement surgery later this month.

“These porches are going to be so important for me, because physically, all of the energy I had five years ago, I don’t have now,” she said. “I am so grateful to be able to have these new and attractive porches. Additionally, I would like to thank the State of Florida, Escambia County, my County Commissioner Bender, and the wonderful people I met from the Escambia County Neighborhood Enterprise Program. They were professional, dedicated, nice, and worked tirelessly to make my home safe. Thank you so much.”

The Escambia County Wheelchair Ramp Program is funded through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership, or SHIP. Limited funding is available, but income-eligible Escambia County residents in need of assistance are encouraged to apply.

To learn more about the Escambia County Wheelchair Ramp Program, including eligibility requirements and application information, please contact the Neighborhood Enterprise Division at ned@myescambia.com or 850-595-1642.



Escambia County resident Hoza Turner on his new porch and wheelchair ramp installed through the Escambia County Wheelchair Ramp Program.



Before and after photos of the wheelchair ramp at Hoza and JoAnn Turner's home



Escambia County resident Charlotte Swearingen on her new porch and wheelchair ramp installed through the Escambia County Wheelchair Ramp Program.





Before and after photos of the wheelchair ramp at Charlotte Swearingen's home



Before and after photos of the side porch at Charlotte Swearingen's home



ESCAMBIA COUNTY WHEELCHAIR RAMP PROGRAM INCOME ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicant must be at or below 80% of the
2023 Area Median Income:

NUMBER OF PERSONS IN FAMILY	50% OF AMI	80% OF AMI
1	\$28,650	\$45,850
2	\$36,850	\$52,400
3	\$36,850	\$58,950
4	\$40,900	\$65,450
5	\$44,200	\$70,700

Due to limited funding, priority may be given to very low income (50% area median income) households.

