



Bob Fenske/Tribune

Members of the Project Flo organization (above) work on painting a home in North Washington while Sophie Glaser and Jennifer and Ella Knutson do the same on a small porch Wednesday afternoon.

ONE WOMAN'S LEGACY

FAMILY, FRIENDS GATHER ONCE AGAIN FOR PROJECT FLO

BY BOB FENSKE
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Flo Thronson had a saying her children heard a million times.

"The Lord will provide."

There's a lot of veracity to that statement, at least if the charity that carries her name is any indication.

Just ask her son Tim, one of 13 Thronsons who he jokes had to live with "middle-child syndrome."

A few years ago, budget constraints were going to keep Project Flo from roofing a house, and then a remarkable set of occurrences happened.

Owens Corning had five pallets of shingles it was willing to donate, but they were in a warehouse in Medina, Ohio.

Tim's sister, Pam, worked for a

Waterloo cabinet firm that had a truck going through Medina that could pick up the shingles, but they had to be dropped off at a "dock."

New Hampton businessman Chip Schwickerath heard the story and pretty much said, "Use our dock and we'll store them for free."

And just like that, a new roof was born. The Lord had indeed provided.

"Things just appear out of nowhere," Tim Thronson said, "and we are so grateful."

IT IS PROJECT Flo Week here in Chickasaw County, and almost all of the Thronson children have come from near and far to help fix up two area homes — one in Fredericksburg and one in North



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Project Flo much more than just a family affair

PROJECT FLO: FROM 1

North Washington.

For the record, Irv and Florence Thronson raised 15 children — Lynn, Larry, Chris, Al, Julie, Shirley, Mike, Betty, Tim, Paul, Annette, Theresa, Pam, Angela and Jennifer.

Two — Mike and Julie — have passed away, but 12 of the 13 remaining siblings held their annual “family reunion.”

Six of the children live in Chickasaw County, Pam lives in Waverly and the rest are spread out all over the United States.

Al lives in Utah, Betty resides in Arizona, Tim lives in North Carolina, Paul and Theresa reside in Texas and Annette lives in Virginia.

And each year, they come together with other members of the community to honor their mother, who they say lived a life of service to others — from raising 15 children to volunteering for numerous organizations and individuals — and was a model steward.

She passed away on May 17, 2011, and her children wanted to honor her life and the example she set.

Project Flo was born.

IN THE SUMMER of 2012, they gathered for the first time for Project Flo, and they’ve reunited for one week every year since to share their gifts with a family in need.

They often do light construction work, paint, replace windows, re-roof homes and other assorted jobs.

When they need experts — this year, they helped with some electrical work, for instance — they hire experts.

“We have people who will talk to us and say, ‘So and so could really use some help,’” Tim Thronson said. “Our board sits down, picks two families and prioritizes what needs to be done. If we run out of money before we’re done with the list, that’s where we stop.”

He paused and couldn’t help but smile. “But like mom said, the Lord provides.”

THAT FIRST YEAR it was basically a “Thronson affair,” and the patriarch of the family, Irv, took part in the project.

“He was really proud and excited that we were doing this,” Lynn Thronson said. “I’m glad he got to see this get off the ground.”

Irv passed away in September 2012, but the project continued and while the Thronsons still provide the majority of the workers, more and more “Thronson-less” people join the project each year.

“That’s really important because we don’t want this to be just a Thronson deal,” Tim Thronson said. “I’d say 20 to 25 percent of our workers aren’t family members and we want that number to grow.”

Maybe most gratifying to those who have been involved with Project Flo since its inception is the fact that families who have received help from the organization volunteer to help out.

“Some people can’t do the manual labor,” Tim Thronson said, “but they cook or they bake bars or they do whatever they can. If you want to help, we’ll find something for you to do.”

In between Project Flo weeks each year, the organization raises money — it has held bake sales, it has received donations and it knows to do the work it wants to do, it costs money.

“The labor we can handle,” Tim Thronson said, “but we also know it’s important to have the money to do help people who need it.”

IRV AND FLORENCE Thronson



Bob Fenske/Tribune

Jackie Morin and Lynn Thronson (above) paint near the peak of a house while Don Dixon and Tim Thronson (below) work on cutting some siding during Project Flo on Wednesday afternoon.



raised a family like no other.

For years, Irv ran the Conoco gas station and Thronson Oil on the corner of Linn and Main; his sons Larry and Mike followed in their father’s footsteps, and Larry continues to do the work his dad did so many years ago.

The Thronson children are now ages 45 to 68, and there are grandchildren and great-grandchildren — grandchild Sophie Glaser, who is 9, was the youngest family member working this year — who look forward to Project Flo every year.

“It’s nice to help people,” Glaser said, “and do it with my family and our friends.”

And, at least during Project Flo, there are no sibling rivalries.

“Oh, we had our moments growing up, just like any other family,” Tim Thronson said, “but here, we just all pull together, roll up our sleeves and go to work. That’s what Mom would have done.”

Somewhere, Irv and Florence Thronson have to be smiling because they know the Lord will provide.

And thanks to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and their friends — some of whom they never met — Project Flo provides the proof of what Flo told her children a million times.