

Falling in love with ASP—FINALLY!

"I fall in love with everything I do at ASP," muses long-time volunteer Tom Cullens, now pastor at St. Augustine Shores United Methodist Church (St. Augustine, FL).



This from a fellow who took six years to get involved!

During college, friends participated in ASP, but Tom never got involved. In 1981, just out of college, relocated, and new in the corporate world, he joined an ASP church—but work blocked his ASP service for two more years! Once started, however, Tom volunteered every summer 1983 - 1987 and served on staff in 1988.

"Perhaps one's first ASP experience is always the most meaningful," he suggests. "Mine truly was life-changing."

The family his team served lived in an old bus—two parents and four young children making a bus that no longer ran their home as the father tried to build a log cabin nearby. An old wood stove sat where the driver's seat had been. No electricity. No running water. No bathroom.



Volunteer Tom Cullens at work under a Central Appalachian home

"The spring they used looked like a mud puddle to us," Tom recalls. "The water was about an inch deep, and the family carefully turned their pail on the side to collect it. Staff provided empty milk jugs so we could carry water to them from the center."

"Each night the father cut trees that staff took to a sawmill, returning with the lumber needed," he continues. "We pushed 'chinking' in cracks between logs to seal the house and then built the interior walls. Another team shingled the roof."

"Our team was there Week 8 for the tremendous effort to finish," Tom says. "On the last day, four work crews, four returners from early summer, and the whole staff worked mightily together to finish this house for this grateful family."

Since then, Tom has missed only one year at ASP—when his mother died. He's been a faithful donor and is a charter member of ASP's new Carpenter's Club for monthly donors as well as a valued member of the Tex Evans Society for folks including ASP in their estate plans. He serves with church groups, as an individual volunteer, and as a skilled ASP Helping Hand. And we thank you, Tom!

He was at ASP's year-round center in Kentucky when it opened. "Welcome to Chavies!" said the note on the door. "If you need a rest room, use the woods. Your first task is to build an outhouse." He helped design and build a state-of-the-art outhouse, shopped area yard sales for rugs, seat covers and a magazine rack, and added door springs and a urinal on the side. "It was pretty fancy," Tom admits.

The following spring, drainage problems necessitated digging a new hole and relocating this outhouse, and four years later, Chavies had indoor plumbing—and volunteers were asked to destroy this amazing outhouse! Although Tom and others grieved, they respectfully put it to rest rather than trusting others not fully appreciative of their masterpiece.

As Tom served at ASP and built a corporate career, his call to the ministry became more pressing. By 1995 he had left the corporate world, completed seminary at Duke, and was ordained a pastor within the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church. Since then he has served several churches there, now pastoring at St. Augustine Shores and still finding ways to serve at ASP each year. *(Please see "How many homes do you see?" story in the May/June issue of The Front Porch newsletter archived on this website.)*

Although Tom's initial ASP service was six years in the making, he more than made up for lost time. He encourages anyone considering such service or getting involved as an ASP donor—or both—to do so now. While his initial experience was definitely worth the wait, Tom notes that some families live in such overwhelming need that right now is a great time to get involved!

Thank you, Tom, for the many ways that you serve as a volunteer, staffer, donor, and friend. We look forward to your service for many years to come and to all those who get involved because you care enough to share and to invite them. May it always be so!