

# Two suites added to Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter

**By Joan Hellyer**  
Staff Writer

Dozens of area volunteers were up and working before dawn Saturday to give local families in need some new, temporary spaces to rebuild their lives.

The approximately 100 volunteers spent much of the day building a 600-square-foot addition onto the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter in Bristol Township. The addition houses two family units, each measuring about 140 square feet, project coordinator Franco D'Andrea said. Up to four people can stay in each unit.

The family suites will give the shelter some flexibility in accommodating people in various family structures, such as a father with a young daughter, or a mom with an adult disabled son, a Family Service Association of Bucks County spokeswoman said. FSA, a nonprofit social service agency, runs the temporary housing facility at 7 Library Way off New Falls and Woodbourne roads.

The shelter, which last year served 316 people, including 125 children, has had to turn families away because its standard configuration includes a family dorm for women and children and a separate dorm just for men, FSA spokeswoman Nicki Bedesem said.

"With the addition of these spaces, we will be able to provide shelter, support and a safe place for families of all types," said FSA Chief Executive Officer Audrey Tucker.

The addition was made possible through a \$150,000 donation from



Cindy Pellegrino-Gruccio, left, and her daughter, Marlena Pellegrino, 24, use a nail gun to secure a window flang on the newly constructed addition onto the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter in Bristol Township on Saturday. [RACHEL WISNIEWSKI/PHOTOJOURNALIST]

the Matthew P. Pellegrino II Memorial Foundation. The donation covered the cost of materials and other supplies.

The foundation is named in honor of Matthew P. Pellegrino II, a 31-year old Cinnaminson, New Jersey, resident who died in a July 5, 1995, work-related accident. His children say supporting the shelter is something their dad would do.

"He wanted to help," daughter Marlena Pellegrino said. "This is what it is all about. It really makes him come to life."

Marlena was almost 2 when her father died and her brother, Matthew P. Pellegrino III, was 3. They barely remember their father, but have grown up learning about him through their work with the foundation.

"He was profoundly good and very supportive of volunteer work," Matthew, 25, said.

Family and friends created the foundation 20

years ago. They primarily raised money through the annual Matthew P. Pellegrino II Memorial Golf Outing, awarded it to a nonprofit organization that serves children and visited the organization later to see what it did with the funding.

This year was different. It was the first time foundation members and other Pellegrino family and friends volunteered to work on a project financed with the funds raised during the golf outing staged in June.

"I gotta go get a tool belt," Matthew P. Pellegrino III joked earlier in the week before the addition went up. "I am expecting to swing a hammer. I hope Franco (D'Andrea) hands me one."

D'Andrea attended Villanova University with Matthew Pellegrino II and his younger brother, Mark. He serves on the foundation's executive committee. When it came

time to pick a charity for the 2017 outing, D'Andrea recommended the homeless shelter project.

D'Andrea, owner of Forrest Grove Enterprises in Horsham, previously coordinated the shelter's recent kitchen and bathroom renovation projects; they were funded by the Buck Up Bucks County campaign, which was spearheaded by this news organization.

The family suites are a perfect way to pay tribute to Pellegrino, D'Andrea said.

"Matty was a very unique individual," he said. "You would never forget Matty once you got to meet him. It's that feeling that makes it very easy for us to want to keep his memory alive."

Like D'Andrea, contractor Chris English also has volunteered on the previous shelter projects. He and several workers from his family's Irwin H. English Company in Springhouse,

## More Information

Call 215-757-6916 or go to [www.fsabc.org/wish-list-shelter/](http://www.fsabc.org/wish-list-shelter/) to see how to help the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter in Bristol Township.

The Family Service Association of Bucks County recently upgraded the county's emergency homeless shelter's heating and cooling system and rehabilitated the facility's dorms using funds from a \$99,975 Community Development Block Grant.

Bristol Township awarded the development grant to the shelter with funds it received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The shelter typically houses about 70 people. The temporary residence facility had been using the same HVAC system for 30 years, but the equipment started to leak in recent years, said FSA spokeswoman Nicki Bedesem in a press release.

The nonprofit organization used the grant to replace five outdated heat pumps and air conditioning units.

FSA also installed new LED lights and replaced ceiling tiles and grids as needed in the shelter's family and men's dorms and office areas, Bedesem said. Additionally, the dorms' floors were stripped and sealed, walls were patched and repainted and new clothing hooks were placed throughout the two living areas to give residents extra space to store their clothing, bath towels and other living necessities.

the structure Saturday.

"It is to symbolically show that these walls are always surrounded by Matty and his love for people," D'Andrea said.

Marlena Pellegrino found herself very emotional, but at the same time happy, knowing that a part of her father will always be in the walls of the family suites. "I think of it as celebrating his life," she said.

The two Pellegrino children said they know their father would want the family suites to be a place of comfort for those who will live there. They feel the same way.

"I hope it provides them with a peaceful place while they are going through a hardship," Marlena Pellegrino, 24, said. "I want it to be a safe place where they feel calm and comfortable."

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