

# SWOOPING IN

Raleigh nonprofit SWOOP shows what a difference a day makes.

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Organization, physical labor, and philanthropy serve as the backbone of the cooperative sisterhood that is SWOOP (Strong Women Organizing Outrageous Projects). This unique Raleigh nonprofit started in 1996 (in response to Hurricane Fran) as a small, unofficial group of female friends who banded together to clean up the debris covering houses and yards. The rewards of the physical challenge and its team execution motivated the group to start “swooping in” for one-day projects, and SWOOP’s reputation grew. So did its membership. Now with more than 1,000 participants, generated from the initial 16, SWOOP continues to reach out to individuals and groups for major cleanups, fence building, painting, refurbishing, construction, deconstruction, and renovation.

#### SPRING CLEANING

SWOOP has three main goals: to help the needy (whether they be elderly, low-income, disabled, or just overwhelmed); to better its members in body, mind, and spirit; and to build a sense of community among women by facilitating a network of friends and fun.

In February, the group cleaned, painted, hung sheetrock, and landscaped at Life Experiences, a nonprofit in Cary that provides employment opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities.

SWOOP’s March plans include completing a large neighborhood project in Durham. “Last year we had 140 volunteers working in the Birchwood Heights neighborhood,” says SWOOP Coordinator Marilee Starr. “This year, we will be working in District 1, hauling off debris and yard waste and doing small carpentry repair projects throughout several blocks.”

#### GET YOUR WINGS

Joining SWOOP is as easy as going online (visit [www.swoop4u.org](http://www.swoop4u.org)) and filling out a brief form. The online form asks questions about labor skills and experience and provides options for less-physical volunteering. Fundraising, photography, marketing, publicity, and being a team leader or in charge of a SWOOP day, are just some of the options to further one’s involvement. About two-thirds of the volunteers are in their 40s and 50s, and, on a typical workday, between 50 and 80 volunteers help out, while larger projects draw more than 100.

SWOOP lays the foundation not only for buildings and playgrounds, but also for long-lasting friendships among dedicated women — at least half of the volunteers on workdays are regulars. “It is such a powerful thing to see a group of 50+ women show up on a Saturday morning and totally transform a house, a yard, or even an entire neighborhood by the end of the day,” Starr says.

“We are able to transform someone’s life through one day of hard work,” she says, “and at the same time empower women who are given an opportunity to learn skills that they may have never tried before.” □



Be prepared for anything: Create a portable “rescue kit,” and stock your own toolbox with the supplies needed to help out a neighbor. For an inventory list, visit [www.ncsignature.com](http://www.ncsignature.com).