

Hillside Lake mother, daughter receive home renovations from Rebuilding Together

[Jack Howland](#), Poughkeepsie Journal Published 6:00 a.m. ET April 29, 2019

HILLSIDE LAKE - Coming of age in the 1950s, Lee Baker remembers her family's summer home was like an escape from the concrete and restlessness of Brooklyn.

Lee, 79, would swim all the way across East Fishkill's Hillside Lake — then far deeper and less polluted than it is today — and stroll around the entire community without ever spotting a car. She found it so special that, in 1970, she and her husband, Patrick Baker, bought a Hillside Road cottage on the water, down the road from her parent's place.

The Brooklyn couple turned their summer home into their full-time home in 1974, adding six bedrooms and a bathroom so they could raise their children in the lake community. Since Lee's husband died in 2011, she has continued living in the home with her 55-year-old daughter, who's one of seven kids.



Lee Baker (right) shares a moment with Rebuilding Together Executive Director Christina Boryk on Saturday outside of her Hillside Lake home. Rebuilding Together fixed up six homes including Lee's on Saturday for National Rebuilding Day. (Photo: Jack Howland/Poughkeepsie Journal)

On Saturday, they both watched as volunteers from the Dutchess chapter of the nonprofit Rebuilding Together renovated the home, free of charge.

"I am so overwhelmed and thankful that these people are here," Lee said amid the flurry of construction activity. "It is unbelievable."

"We would have barbecues here; we would have big parties here," added her daughter, Annmarie Baker. "It was a sense of joy, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of family."

The project, led by volunteers from Rebuilding Together, was an effort to restore a home with several problems both superficial and dealing with safety. It also was about giving a second life to a decades-old family gathering place.

Christina Boryk, the executive director of Rebuilding Together, said the organization is interested in helping residents with aging or decrepit homes stay in place. The home received a long list of renovations on Saturday, Boryk said — from putting down a new stone path in the front yard, to replacing the front and back doors, to installing a bannister in the stairwell leading to the second floor.



Marc Dennis (right), of Beacon, holds the ladder for Larry Theisen, of Hyde Park, as he works on replacing the front door of Lee Baker's Hillside Lake home. The volunteers were two of 25 who were working on the home. (Photo: Jack Howland/Poughkeepsie Journal)

Lee was one of six homeowners across Dutchess to receive renovations from Rebuilding Together on Saturday, which was National Rebuilding Day. There were about 25 volunteers at the Hillside Road home, representing organizations including local United Methodist churches and the Arlington Teacher's Association.

"Especially for our older adults, (the renovations) really allow them to stay in the place where they have those memories, where they're comfortable, where they know their neighbors," Boryk said. "And they can really age in place."

The nonprofit expects to do large-scale renovations like this on about 20 homes in 2019, she said. Homeowners such as Lee have to apply for the work.

Volunteers plan on coming back to Hillside Road sometime in the summer, Boryk said, to put in a new balcony on the second floor.



Annmarie Baker (right) hugs Rebuilding Together Executive Director Christina Boryk outside of her mother's Hillside Lake home on Saturday. She said the home has kept family traditions alive. (Photo: Jack Howland/Poughkeepsie Journal)

For Lee and Annmarie, the day of renovations felt like Christmas morning, they said. And it brought back a flood of memories.

"I was standing down at the lake this morning," Annmarie said, "thinking about a lot of things that have happened over the years."

She remembers her father, who commuted to Manhattan to his bartender job, loved to play host at their neighborhood parties and memorize everyone's favorite drink. He had a quick wit — often saying with a smile that he got better-looking every day — and taught them to be generous, she said.

Patrick served in the Army in the late 1950s as a teenager. Although he was never involved in the Korean War, Lee said he was in Little Rock, Arkansas for the riots surrounding school integrations.

His ashes sit "right next to my bed," Lee said, alongside a folded American flag.



A framed photo in Lee Baker's bedroom shows she and her husband on their wedding day. They moved from Brooklyn to Hillside Lake in 1974 because their rent had gone up. (Photo: Jack Howland/Poughkeepsie Journal)

The home, she said, has helped her keep his memory alive. But she wants to make new memories, too.

Lee's brother has a summer home in the Hillside Lake community and her sister lives about two and a half miles away. Lee's children and grandchildren also live throughout the state.

Hillside Lake, still, is where they get together.

“It’s not just the house,” Annmarie said of what makes the place so special. “It’s the whole lake community.”

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