



Rita Harmon

Goodwill Housing Success Story

Rita Harmon spent most of her adult life as a live-in caregiver for her elderly, disabled mother. When her mother passed away a half a decade ago, Rita suddenly realized that she had been neglecting to look after her own well-being. She had no job, no skills, and no income, and with a medical disability, Rita feared the worst.

"This was right about the time that the economy came," she says grimly. "There were no jobs out there. And I had nothing lined up for after my mother passed. I was so depressed, and so despondent, I literally felt like I lost control of me."

With no family to turn to after her mother's death, finding a home was a high priority. She didn't know that Goodwill offered disability-accessible housing until a construction sign went up on a vacant lot across the street from her mother's former home.

"I was on the verge of being homeless. I had no place to turn, just total desperation," she says. "It was really, really a tough time. And all of a sudden, a sign went up on this property, and things started falling into place."

Rita contacted Goodwill's housing office, and after applying and providing evidence of her income and disability, was approved to move in when construction completed. She settled into her one-bedroom Goodwill apartment in Lehigh just in time for the apartment complex ribbon-cutting, and proudly offered tours of her apartment to all who came.

In the four years since moving in with her dog, Baby, Rita says her life has completely changed—for the better.

"I have a sense of pride, a sense of independence," she says, adding that since moving in, she's also lost 70 pounds. "I'm literally a new person, mentally and physically."

"Goodwill helped me to not only have a place to live, but to have a home, and literally have a life again," Rita smiles. "I am so thankful."



About Southwest Florida GWI Housing:

Southwest Florida Goodwill Housing provides barrier-free apartments for persons with physical disabilities, providing the opportunity for affordable, convenient, and independent living.

Goodwill operates 14 income-sensitive apartment complexes for adults with physical disabilities, along with the Hatton B Rogers Retirement Community, a 54-unit complex for senior citizens. These complexes are located in Lee, Charlotte, and Hendry Counties.

Two new apartment complexes are scheduled to open in 2014 in North Fort Myers and Clewiston.

In total, 301 residents resided in Goodwill's safe, affordable, and accessible housing in 2013.

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