

# Mission at the Eastward lends a helping hand



Barry Matulaitis/Franklin Journal  
Ken White, coordinator of work projects at Mission at the Eastward, speaks at the Farmington Rotary's July 21 meeting.

By Barry Matulaitis,  
Staff Editor

FARMINGTON — “For me, it’s been an incredible journey,” said New Portland resident Ken White of his volunteer service to Mission at the Eastward (MATE) during the Farmington Rotary’s July 21 meeting.

Mission at the Eastward was organized in 1954 by the National Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church to support the ministry of newly organized Presbyterian congregations serving small, rural communities. Both

congregations and pastors depended upon one another. Christian witness took two forms: Organizing congregations in underserved communities and providing social outreach.

Its vision statement is as follows: “Mission at the Eastward is a dynamic, forward-looking family of Presbyterian churches and service ministries located in West Central Maine, inspired by Christ to worship and work, “reaching the last house on the last road” with God’s gifts and graces so they are exemplified, multiplied, and shared with others for the good of all.”

White has been with the organization about six years. One day, Ed Jestradt, the North Parish Housing Ministry Coordinator, paid him a visit and asked if he could volunteer for MATE. “The rest is kind of history,” said White. MATE does 70-90 projects per year for the needy in the community, relying solely on donations for funding. White coordinates these projects with help from his son Kevin. The two organize the 300-400 volunteers who pitch in and do the work each summer.

White mentioned that Camp Hill, Pennsylvania Presbyterian Church has been coming to Maine to volunteer their labor for the projects for three decades. Not only have they volunteered their work,

they have donated trucks to MATE.

A motto of MATE is keeping people safe, warm, and dry. They do everything from yard work to building houses.

“I had a request for a frog pond last year and I had to deny it,” said White. “There were other priorities.”

He said that judging which MATE projects take priority “is very challenging.” Applications are received in the spring, and projects finalized in early June. Each week during the summer, work groups will arrive Saturday night and attend church Sunday morning. Sunday afternoon, they do site visits. Monday morning, the work commences and continues through Friday.

“I get in shape in the summer and eat a lot in the winter,” White joked. “It’s a very gratifying experience.”

Many people are afraid to ask for help.

“The faces of desperation out there are well hidden,” said White. “People have something called pride. It’s difficult for them to ask for help.”

He said there’s always a need for volunteers and materials. “We do the best job we can with what we have.”

Also, said White, “This is a non-denominational mission. I think this program is a wonderful one.”

To learn more, visit [www.missionattheeastward.org](http://www.missionattheeastward.org) or [bmatalaitis@summedagroup.net](mailto:bmatalaitis@summedagroup.net)

## Mission at the Eastward by the numbers

- Here is a glance at some of the 2015 statistics showing the impact Mission at the Eastward has had on the community:
- Total applications: 90
  - Two referred to other housing programs.
  - Five were church projects, including the local food pantry.
  - 70 families served, an all-time high.
  - Of the 70 served in 2015, 25 to be continued into 2016.
  - Seven applications were denied.
  - Six were completely deferred to 2016.
  - Of the 70 families served:
    - 15 in the Farmington area (two in Temple)
    - 11 in Jay
    - 12 in Wilton
    - Two in Chesterville, one in New Sharon, and one in East Dixfield
  - Three in Livermore Falls and one in Livermore
  - 14 in New Portland
  - Two each in North Anson, Anson and Embden
  - One in Moscow
  - Two in New Vineyard and one in Lexington
  - Of the 70 families:
    - 57 percent have incomes below \$15,000. This has been between 55 and 66 percent in recent years.
    - 23 percent are between \$15,000 and \$20,000, within the 20 to 28 percent range of recent years.
    - 20 percent have family income greater than \$20,000. This has been between 14 and 20 percent.
    - Average family size is 2.2.
    - 49 percent of the clients considered themselves elderly.
    - 13 percent are single parents.
  - 47 percent report some form of disability.
  - 44 percent of the homes were single occupant. This has been the norm the last five years.
  - For the 70 homes:
    - 37 percent involved roof work.
    - 29 percent window repairs/replace-ment.
    - 21 percent exterior door replacement.
    - 20 percent external house painting.
    - The remainder: sub-floor repairs (17 percent), steps and stairs (seven percent), skirting (nine percent), interior painting (seven percent), drywall and insulating (12 percent), minor electrical and plumbing (15 percent), clean-up-trash removal (10 percent), porch, steps, and stairs (13 percent). Many sites had multiple needs, hence the percentages listed add up to more than 100 percent.