Did you know there are more than 17,000 veterans in Kent County who are 55 years of age or older? Thanks to a new partnership with The Home Depot Foundation and Meals on Wheels America, these heroes who bravely served our country are receiving much-needed home repairs to increase the safety and livability of their homes. The work being done, such as a new roof or rewiring of an unsafe electrical fixture, also provides peace of mind and decreased stress for the veterans.

Ed, age 74, served at Camp Page in Korea as a Radio Teletype Team Chief and knows from firsthand experience that updates to your home significantly improve the quality of your life. He had been surviving without running water for more than two years! Unfortunately, being on a fixed income often forces older adults to get by in far less than ideal situations just to make ends meet. For Ed his situation changed once he heard from his Senior Neighbors case manager, Michelle, about the generous Helping Homebound Heroes grant. Repairs were made and Ed once again has running water.

Because of the generosity of The Home Depot Foundation and Meals on Wheels America, much-needed home repairs are becoming a reality for Kent County veterans. We are so thankful for this new partnership and for all our supporters who make our Home Maintenance Program possible.
Skip, age 70, is a widower and knows how lonely one can feel after a spouse passes away. After three years alone, Skip became a member of our Sparta Senior Center and chose to provide his time as a volunteer. Life became more interesting for Skip. Then, the Sparta Senior Center held an event which changed Skip’s life.

The life-changing event focused on friendship. Seniors who attended the Friendship Event viewed a movie called *The Age of Love* which follows the lives of 30 seniors, 70–to–90 years old, who signed up for the first-of-its kind speed dating event for seniors.

Whoa – speed dating! Just the thought of dating, let alone speed dating, frightens many seniors. This is why the Sparta Senior Center decided to focus on friendship instead of dating. Reluctantly, Skip attended the Friendship Event. After the attendees viewed the movie, they sat at tables of two (just women, women and men, and just men) for a timed conversation. Individuals noted who they would be willing to meet with as a friend and the Senior Center staff communicated these decisions to the seniors. As a result, many new friendships began and blossomed.

While Skip developed new friendships, the Friendship Event made him realize that he deeply missed being in a loving, supportive relationship with a woman. He bravely thanked the Center Coordinator, Jane, for encouraging him to attend the Event. Skip received support for his desire to meet someone from his children, his church, and, of course, the Sparta Senior Center. Today, Skip is engaged to Vicki. He met his future bride at church and quickly got her involved in the Sparta Senior Center activities.

Because of you, Skip had an opportunity to connect with other seniors at a Senior Center and, ultimately, open his heart to a loving relationship. Because of you, Skip no longer feels alone.

**Seniors are Superheros**

Superheroes are dedicated to fighting crimes, protecting the public, and usually battling supervillains; however, this year, the theme of our Senior Picnic was “Seniors are our Superheros” so the focus was all about having fun! Seniors were encouraged to dress as their favorite superhero. The event started with a Service Fair where seniors learned about the offerings of 40 senior-oriented service providers. The fair was followed by a luncheon where seniors enjoyed a Meals on Wheels lunch and the opportunity to win raffle prizes. Additionally, the seniors sang, danced, laughed, and smiled as they listened to the musical entertainment provided by the dueling pianos. As part of the musical festivities, our Grand Rapids Center Coordinator, Jonathan Bates, dressed as Superman, started a conga line that brought many seniors to their feet to join in the fun!

* Statistics based upon FY16 data.