

## Porta-potty Prank Victim Brings Inspiration to Community

You may remember the story: a bus driver in Wilmington stops to use a porta-potty, when some kids pull a prank. They tip it over, and that one moment changes the driver's life forever. He's paralyzed from the waist down. His name is Pedro Toala, and he's been confined to a wheelchair since the accident in June of last year. He's got every right to be bitter, but he's not. Instead, he's inspiring an entire community to open their hearts, and their wallets.

What's happening at the Toala's house outside Wilmington is extraordinary.

"This is the story that gets you right in your heart," Susan Simmons explained. "You can't ignore this and say no."

No one has been saying "no" to Toala. He lives in a split-level home with his wife and two kids. All the other people crowding inside and outside his house are volunteers. That includes Simmons, who is a vice president at a local company called the "Planning Factory," which organizes corporate events. The volunteers are offering their time, their money, and their expertise to make life more livable for the Toalas.

"Someone did something really devastating to Pedro and his family, but there are really good people who will help now," Cher Przelomski told Fox 29. Przelomski is CEO of the Planning Factory, and together with Simmons has been devoting hundreds of hours of her time to helping the Toalas.

Pedro Toala's life took the tragic turn near the basketball courts under Interstate 95 in Wilmington. He had pulled his DART bus over to use the porta-potty, when some of the players on the courts knocked it over, trapping Toala inside with all that human waste. The fall broke his spine, paralyzing him. And yet he's still smiling. "My life has changed already so, I'm going to look forward to whatever's coming in the future," Toala explained. "They don't want anything except to go on with their lives," Przelomski added. "And what we want for them is to go on with their lives in a way that is easier than what they experience now on a day-to-day basis."

Late last week, the Toalas moved out of their home temporarily. Volunteers packed up their belongings, to make way for a new beginning. Monday morning, construction crews moved in. Contractors, plumbers, and electricians, all working for free, will re-design part of the house to make it more handicap accessible. They'll be expanding the master bedroom, and building a patio so Toala can watch his kids play outside. And they'll be adding a lift, so Toala can have access again to other parts of the house. "So for the first time in what will be 18 months, he'll be able to get to the first floor and interact with his family, have a meal at the dining room table, be able to cook again in the kitchen," Przelomski said. "You see, my wife and I, we're from two different countries," Toala continued. "Sometimes I'd like to have something for my own tastes, you know what I'm saying?" Toala said with a laugh.

As much help as the Toala family is getting from the community, volunteers say they're getting back something invaluable. **"Fulfillment," Charles Wilkinson, the owner of Wilkinson Builders, told Fox 29. "There's not too many words I can put with it, just makes you like helping other people."** "This will be my present, I think, in the end," added Daniella Pifano, an architect with Mitchell Associates.

The goal is to complete the renovation so the Toalas can return home for the holidays. "I didn't know there was such beautiful people like that," Toala said.

Fox 29 spent two mornings over the past week with the Toalas, and what we saw was really remarkable. Last week, a fuel company called to offer free oil to heat the home through winter. And Monday, landscapers showed up to take some measurements. They'll repair the yard after the construction workers finish up.

