

Susan Giddens

SJHP Rehab and Community Projects Manager

If residential rehab takes an orchestra of players, then at St. Johns Housing Partnership, Susan Giddens is its conductor. Giddens pulls together the workers, permits, inspections and financing that gets leaking roofs repaired and wheelchair ramps built for low-income people.

A Navy veteran and former high school science teacher, Giddens established herself in home building as a field manager for Summit Contracting, the nation's largest residential contractor. All went well until 2008.

"The housing industry bottomed out. And I was at the bottom of the bottom," she said. "I needed a job. Bill Lazar needed a helper."

Working for Lazar at SJHP made Giddens realize she had a place in the community. It also opened her eyes to how others live. A person can afford a house when they're working, but when they get old and lose their spouse, they can lose and half their income. They don't want to move to a nursing home or live with their kids. But they can't afford to repair their roof.

Helping needy homeowners is a tough mission, but it's the right one for Giddens.

"I found what I'm good at. I don't give up. I keep helping people until they are able to stay in their homes," she said.