

People



Angels

Allen (center) with Jennifer McIntosh, 18, and Kyle McIntyre, 14, in Greenfield, N.H.

Tree for All

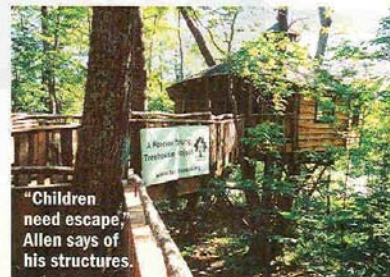
Inspired by the tree houses of his childhood, Bill Allen now builds them for disabled kids

Bill Allen recalls with joy how as a boy he built a tree house with his two brothers behind their Charlestown, N.H., home, scrounging for scraps of lumber. "I can't imagine a childhood," he says, "without the memory of being in a tree house."

Now he makes those memories for kids who thought tree houses were out of their reach—literally. As cofounder (with friend Phil Trabulsy) of the nonprofit Forever Young Treehouses, Allen leads a team that builds colossal, whimsical structures with wheelchair ramps.

Using donated labor and material, the group has built seven (at \$100,000 apiece), mostly for groups serving kids with disabilities. "I like looking at the sky through the window in the roof and the ground through the hole in the floor," says Shawn, 6, who lives at Greenfield, N.H.'s Crotched Mountain School, where Allen finished a project in January. "It's my special place."

Allen, an insurance agent, came up with the idea in 1998 after building a tree house to cheer up Trabulsy, 46, who was recovering from an illness. In January he



"Children need escape," Allen says of his structures.

took a break from his job to build tree houses full-time. (He draws a modest salary from Forever Young.) Two more are under construction, and Allen—who has son Noah, 2, with wife Lara, 36, a clothing shop owner—hopes to build one in every state by 2008. No matter who you are, he says, "climbing a tree should be such a simple thing." ●

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For more on Forever Young Treehouses, go to www.people.com or AOL (Keyword: People)

Photograph by MARGARET LAMPERT