



## **Tom's Story**

### **Outline of Need:**

Deaf from birth, and living on a limited income, Tom had a dream of owning his own home, but never knew how to achieve that goal.

### **How Rural Development Helped:**

Tom read a local newspaper article about USDA Rural Development's Self Help Housing program administered by Whatcom-Skagit Housing (WSH) and decided to investigate. He contacted WSH who assisted him with the application process. During the pre-construction stage, WSH included special accommodations in the plans and specifications to improve Tom's quality of life. Items such as a strobe light doorbell, flashing light smoke detector, and flashing light phone detector (which causes a lamp to flash when the phone rings) were included in the USDA Rural Development housing loan to ensure that his needs were met.

### **The Result:**

With USDA Rural Development 502 Single Family Housing funds, and technical assistance construction supervision from WSH, Tom completed the construction of his home along with the other owner-builders in June 2002. Through rain, snow, and sunshine, Tom and his parents were there each day to work on his and seven other families' homes.

While visiting with Tom about his new home, he said, "Not only did it give me the opportunity to own my own house, but I experienced a work environment where my fellow builders became my friends." Tom said he was nervous meeting new people in the beginning because he feared they would not understand him. But he later said, "My nervousness disappeared as all seven families in our group accepted me for who I am and did not treat me any differently for being deaf."

Now the proud owner of his own home, Tom stated, "I feel a lot of pride in what I've accomplished." His best memory of the building process is the people helping each other, especially his parents who were there interpreting for him through sign language. Now that he has moved into his house, he is not able to keep the smile off his face. He states, "Going through the building process has given me a sense of self-confidence, responsibility and the pride of ownership."

Tom believes that this dream would have never been possible without the assistance from USDA Rural Development, Whatcom-Skagit Housing, his parents, and the seven other owner-builders who worked together to make his home a reality.