



JIMMY LAROU/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

Former NFL player Chris Long helps install a new well for Wayne and Belinda Crawford's home on Whaleyville Boulevard Wednesday. The installation was the first project for Long's Hometown H2O, a domestic water program dedicated to bringing sustainable water to communities in need, especially rural ones.

High-quality H2O for Suffolk family

BY JIMMY LAROU
STAFF WRITER

Gray skies and trying times in their efforts to fix up their home couldn't deter Wayne and Belinda Crawford Wednesday as they got what they had long desired — clean, crystal-clear water.

The couple visited Suffolk, fell in love with the area, and two years ago, moved their family from Philadelphia to an area of Suffolk south of Whaleyville, less than two miles from the North Carolina border.

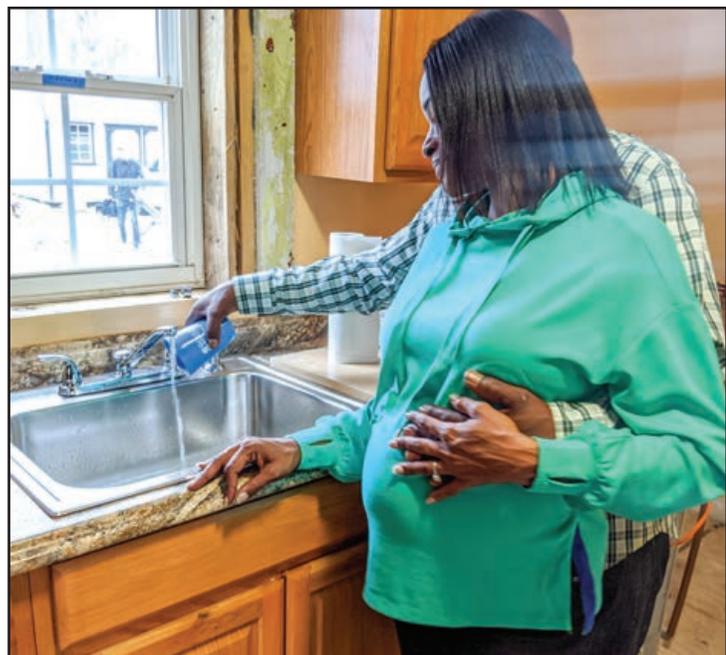
But getting to that point took them about two years and a heavy dose of what Wayne Crawford, 53, likes to call the three Ps — patience, prayer and perseverance. They also got some outside help from someone with roots in the city of their past, and now the city of their present and future.

Chris Long, who played football at the University of Virginia

and then the NFL for 11 seasons with the then-St. Louis Rams, New England Patriots and Philadelphia Eagles — lent his assistance as the founder and president of The Chris Long Foundation and Hometown H2O.

Long's organization partnered with water technology company Xylem, Water Well Trust, Winsupply Co. and Creason Well Service Inc. to install a new well on the Crawfords' property on Whaleyville Boulevard.

The Crawfords moved to Suffolk wanting to give themselves and their five children a better life, and they bought the 1,216-square-foot home in 2018. They started to experience issues with their water about six months ago when the shallow well pump near the back of their property began pumping sand and water into the house.



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Wayne and Belinda Crawford turn on the water in their home's kitchen sink after a new well was installed on their Whaleyville Boulevard property Wednesday. Several organizations came together to get the well installed. The Crawford family expects to move back into the home in about two weeks after additional work is completed to the home.

Water: Family gets new well at rural home

Continued from page 1

Already facing more work than they expected on their nearly 70-year-old fixer-upper of a house, the family faced having to spend thousands of dollars more — money the family did not have. Compounding their issues, Wayne Crawford is currently on disability for a back injury, and Belinda Crawford, 34, is due to give birth to a baby boy in March.

Without running water, the city's Department of Social Services would not allow them to live in the house, so they have bounced around to hotels in the area, out-of-state family, and back into hotels for at least another two weeks. That has been a challenge for their children.

"There was a lot of ups and downs, and in the midst of everything is when you find the most turmoil and the most chaos, and it's just powered us," Wayne Crawford said. "The greatest part about that is when you have the courage and the strength to move forward, past that, and get out of it. It leaves you in a better position with each other, and that's where we are."

Wayne Crawford said he spiraled into a depression for the first couple of months here, unable to find janitorial work. Belinda Crawford had been a home health aide and telemarketer, but she wasn't able to find work. They had their own cleaning company, but after his back injury, bills piled up and then they couldn't afford to put the necessary work into their home.

The Crawfords applied for assistance through the non-profit Water Well Trust, Hometown H2O and Xylem, with the latter company coordinating the donation of the water and equipment from its partners, Noland Supply of Elizabeth City, N.C., and Creason & Sons of Zuni. The companies began preparing the well site about a week ago for Wednesday's installation.

Xylem Vice President Joe Vesey said his company provided the people to do the work at the Crawfords' home, and the pumping system to pump water from the well to the house. It also worked with a well driller and Water Well Trust to get water for their home. Xylem donated and installed a submersible pump 500 feet underground to take water into the house.

Long's Hometown H2O program had done all of its work internationally in places such as Tanzania and Kenya — 85 wells internationally that have helped more than 200,000

people, he said — but he had always wanted to do more domestically, citing the 1.5 million people in the United States who do not have access to clean water.

"This illustrates the big need for solutions like this that these folks at Xylem and Water Well Trust are doing to find families that need it as bad as these folks do," Long said.

Long, who gained a heightened awareness of water scarcity and poverty on a global scale in 2012 while on a trip to Tanzania to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, stressed that talking about numbers is not enough when there are families like the Crawfords who have lacked an adequate water supply. Not every issue with water is as big as the crisis in Flint, Mich., that began in 2014. Long said many people like the Crawfords are forgotten in the fight for clean water.

"The family of six or eight people might not be solving the world water crisis or even the domestic crisis with one family," Long said, "but what I think is important is it illustrates how normal these folks are ... but these kids don't have clean water."

Xylem and its volunteers coming from its corporate social responsibility program, Watermark, are also completing interior and exterior home improvement projects on the property. Those include installing a shower in the bathroom and fixing a warped front porch.

Wanda Crawford said their experience with Long, Xylem and the rest of those helping them has restored their hope, and they are committed to giving back to others.

Still on disability, they are looking for a reliable vehicle for their children since they had to sell their family vehicle due to mounting bills. They have just a pickup truck that Wayne Crawford uses for odd jobs he can pick up



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Back row, from left: Chris Long, Wayne Crawford, Belinda Crawford and Isiah Crawford, 15. Front row, from left: Charmaine Carrington, 12; Jeremiah Carrington, 9; and Terreem Turpin, 8. Another child, Nasirah Crawford, 13, is not pictured. Long, a former NFL player, helped install a well for the Crawford family's property. The well is the first project for Long's Hometown H2O organization, which is an extension of The Chris Long Foundation's Waterboys initiative and the result of a partnership with Xylem.

and for the janitorial work that he hopes to do again once his back heals.

The couple, married for four years, is looking forward to being back in their home in about two weeks' time — now with the clean water they needed.

"These volunteers changed our way of believing," Belinda Crawford said. "They even changed our expectations of people. They gave us a lot. They'll always have a place in our hearts."

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