

Shared investment

Area residents help make a house a home

By Marilyn Yaqulinto
staff writer

Sweat, equity. That's what Habitat for Humanity volunteers call the hours of labor which are donated to convert an abandoned house into an affordable, comfortable place to call home.

Denise Lomax, who with her four children, will move into one of Habitat's renovated homes, was asked to invest 400 hours as part of the deal. Along with Lomax, more than 25 volunteers from in and around metro Detroit last week invested plenty of sweat and a lot of tender loving care in rebuilding the home out of a boarded-up, run-down building on the city's near east side.

Habitat for Humanity — the worldwide ecumenical Christian organization which specializes in providing housing to low-income families — sponsored the home's sprucing up as part of an ongoing nationwide program.

"Painting, spackling and sanding are the things I always do," said Troy resident Ruth Turner, who's worked on seven Habitat homes in the last three years. "There's a real sense of camaraderie with the people you work with — a sense of accomplishment when you see (the house) finished."

Through her work with teens at the Madison Heights Community Education Center, Turner sees the impact of adequate housing on a family's stability.

"I SEE KIDS trying to struggle with sub-standard housing — it real-

ly affects them," said Turner. "I'd like to see a (Habitat) chapter open up in Pontiac — there are so many beautiful old homes that can be fixed up. Even in Oakland County, there's a lot of people living on assistance."

Turner, along with fellow volunteers Roberta Chapman and Karen Joy, became interested in Habitat's program through their church — Northminster Presbyterian in Troy.

"I first read about it in the newspaper and I just called up and volunteered," said Chapman, a retired librarian who edits the local chapter's newsletter. Other retired volunteers help Chapman reach the chapter's 2,000 members.

Birmingham residents Bob and Clara Hermann also became Habitat volunteers more than five years ago through their church. During the next four weeks, the Hermanns will be working on Habitat homes in Michigan and Ohio, although volunteer work has become a rewarding staple of their retirement lifestyle on a permanent basis. In other work camps, they've traveled to Appalachia and Haiti, where they lent their talents to painting and installing cement block.

"We're putting closet doors up and replacing a window," said Bob Hermann, with an enthusiasm that defied the blistering afternoon temperatures — which were pushing past the 90 degree mark.

AS HE TUGGED at the bright red sweat band draped across his forehead, the former senior project engineer at General Motors said he rarely offers technical advice — he's

content to paint or "do whatever needs to be done."

"If you don't know how to do a job, there are a lot of fellows around here that will teach you — and being a homeowner in Birmingham, we knew how to do a lot of these things already," said Clara Hermann, with a tone of authority about fixing up an older but durable home.

Of the crew working at the Flanders address in Detroit, about one-third came from out of state to volunteer their talents and are being housed at the Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit. Korean Presbyterian Church of Southfield and Grace Memorial Church of Westland are providing meals.

A dedication and celebration party was planned at the Flanders house last Saturday, following the crew's final day of work.

"That's the fun part, but we're going to have to miss it," said Clara Hermann, who talked about the Lomax family, quickly rattling off the ages of the children like any family friend.

In honor of Habitat's 15th anniversary celebration, 15 such traveling camps are building homes in 255 communities across the country over a 15-week period this summer.

According to Rick Renwick, a management specialist at Ford Motor Company and a local Habitat leader, only a small percentage of the low-income buyers selected by Habitat run into serious problems after taking over the homes. "We try to involve the people and get their feedback — I think that's why we're so successful."

In larger cities, abandoned houses are given to Habitat but in less-populated areas, new homes are constructed, said Renwick. In a famous circumstance, former president Jimmy Carter, an avid Habitat supporter, unstained the red tape in Detroit to get the first three houses donated. Renwick said the Salvation Army is helping secure more abandoned Detroit houses for future renovation, particularly in the Brightmoor area.

JOHN LAW, a Birmingham resident and retired property manager, was helping to hang aluminum siding Thursday in Detroit, but his Habitat experience also includes a year's tour as the chapter's project manager.

Law found Habitat five years ago through his Christian men's group — better known as the Sunrises because they meet Wednesday mornings for early breakfast meetings at the First Detroit Baptist Church in Southfield.

"I don't like something for nothing programs," said Law. "With Habitat, there's a number of things the homeowner has to do — and it gives the person a sense of dignity."

Several "sunrises" are Habitat workers, although Law admits some volunteers were reluctant at first to come to Detroit and work on houses that might end up shoddy or run-down again.

"But then they come down here and meet the people — they're poor but there's no other difference. Not when they have poured their own sweat equity into a house."



Oakland County residents were an integral part of last week's project to renovate a three-bedroom house on Detroit's east side for a low-income family.



Birmingham resident and retired property manager John Law prepares the old woodwork for new window seals.



Roberta Chapman, along with other volunteers from Northminster Presbyterian Church in Troy, handles a hammer as expertly as a paint brush.

Family Reading Challenge 1991

Know Your Library

Visit your local library with a parent or other adult today. Browsing at the library can help you choose books and magazine articles for the Family Reading Challenge 1991.

Here is a game you can play while you are there. Try to find as many of the items listed below as you can. Have fun!

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| A book by Roald Dahl | Zillions (a children's magazine) |
| Encyclopedias | This newspaper |
| Records or cassette tapes | A card catalog |
| A book about space | A book about your state |
| A microfiche reader | The children's section |
| Adult mysteries | A copying machine |
| Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature | A biography |

We hope you enjoyed this. Don't forget to complete the entry form below as soon as you have met the requirements of the challenge.

Family Reading Challenge 1991 Entry Form

Yes! I have read at least:

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and discussed them with my parents, grand or other adult

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Please register me for the Sept. 16 drawing of 2 cards. The grand prize this year will be an IBM Writing to Read Laboratory for the young reader's school, and an IBM PC for his or her family. Other awards will include Rex and Rita hand puppets and shirts, World Book encyclopedias, books, bicycles and more!

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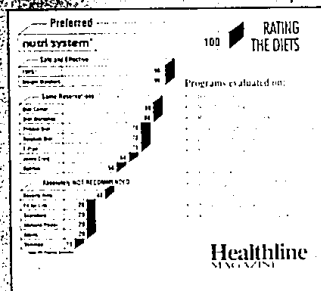
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