



## KU Habitat for Humanity

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A place to call home: With Habitat's help, Bryan family looks forward to moving in



By VIMAL PATEL

Toshia Newsome and her children (from left) Cedricka, Cedaisia and Jamarcus will help build their new home.

Blue Baker employee Clay Kronke is among the volunteers who helped raise the first wall of the house Friday. The home is part of the Bryan-College Station Habitat for Humanity program.

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Jamarcus Newsome carries stakes to workers at the site of his future home, which is being built through Habitat for Humanity.

Jamarcus Newsome moves the kitchen table each night so there's enough room to unfurl his folding bed.

The 12-year-old sleeps in the dining room of a cramped two-bedroom Bryan apartment with his mom and twin sisters.

Thanks to a helping hand from the community, the Jane Long Middle School student soon will have his own room. Early Friday morning, Habitat for Humanity volunteers began building a three-bedroom home for the family.



Toshia Newsome, 31, said she was most excited about having peace of mind. She lives on Verde Drive off Harvey Mitchell Parkway, where she doesn't feel comfortable allowing her kids to play outside unsupervised, she said.

On Friday, she stood on the pavement of what soon will be the first house she has ever owned and smiled. Sunlight came through a cluster of trees, birds chirped and the single mom pointed to a nearby patch of land where a new park will be built. "It's all so peaceful," she said.

Bryan-College Station Habitat for Humanity has built a cluster of about 50 homes in the Angels Gate subdivision. One hundred lots have been set aside, and the goal is to fill each with a home for a family. A wall raising will be held for a home for the Whittine family April 3.

The homes cost about \$70,000 to \$80,000, said Mike Sutton, director of development. A large chunk of that comes from the house's sponsor -- in this case a collection of local businesses -- with the rest coming from homeowner mortgage payments, donations and grants.

Recipients of a Habitat for Humanity home must meet several criteria, including taking a homeownership workshop, volunteering for 500 hours, having incomes that fall between 30 and 60 percent of the median local income based on family size and showing the need for a safe, affordable home.

On Friday morning, about two dozen volunteers arrived at the construction site by 8 a.m.

Annette Becker, 20, gently swept dirt off the pavement with a neon-green broom. She had helped to prop up windows at a nearby home earlier in the week.

John Martin, a retired veterinarian, provided expertise, supervising the largely inexperienced group. The former Texas A&M instructor, who has had plenty of building experience in his 71 years, volunteers with Habitat for Humanity about two or three days a week.

Maria Zielinski, Jacki Murdock and John Hagerty -- all University of Kansas students on spring break -- nailed a board to a newly erected wooden wall. The trio, along with several others from Kansas, knew they wanted to spend their vacation someplace warm. Aggieland was as good a place as any.

Jamarcus fetched a sledgehammer because he was too young to help with the construction of the home that will give him his own room.

Bryan Fruge, a graduate student in the Bush School of Government, helped hoist the first wall as Martin instructed, "Get your fingers under it. Watch the dust! Watch the dust!"



Foruge said he liked being outside and working with his hands.

Hanging out with friends and doing something to help others also was a draw.

And Eva Benavides, a teacher at Sul Ross Elementary School, lovingly picked up nails scattered across the floor. That was her job as a kid when her dad used to build stuff. She's got tales about what could happen when nails aren't picked up.

Newsome fought back tears as she thanked the crowd of volunteers before hugging her 11-year-old twins, Cedaisia and Cedricka.

It was a dream come true, she said.

Life hasn't been easy for Newsome. She worked upward of 55 hours a week until she cut down a bit.

Now she works about 40 hours at an assisted-living home.

These times are tougher than usual for a lot of people, she said. A deep faith has given her strength, she said.

"I kept on hearing, 'You don't have enough this,' or 'Your credit isn't enough this,'" she said. "But God led me to the newspaper; he led me to inquire about Habitat for Humanity. Just don't give up, and trust in God."



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