



## Home for the Holidays

*Breaking Bread Together Means a Little More for These Habitat Families*

by Gregory Crawford

Breaking bread together – whether among family or with friends and neighbors – can be one of the most significant things we do. But where we break bread and how is not something we tend to think very much about.

That's not the case for Justyna Buniowska, who, with her husband Witold and their five children (pictured above), recently moved into their new home at 1 Dutch Lane in Bridgewater. "I'm thinking about the table," Justyna said, "We have a table someone gave us and now we're thinking of buying (a new) one. It has to be big enough for the whole family – at least eight chairs," she said. "A solid wood table that will be with us forever."

Those are the kinds of thoughts that people can entertain when they have a house to live in – a dream that the Buniowskis were able to fulfill after working hard putting in their 500 hours of sweat equity.

Marisol Sierra also is thinking about entertaining. Marisol moved with her three children into 150 Southside Avenue at the same time the Buniowskis moved into their home. "I don't like to entertain, but I'll be entertaining this year," she said. "It's definitely going to be (a holiday season) to remember. It'll be my first in my own home."

Now that the Buniowskis and Sierras are in their homes, the spirit of giving – giving thanks come late November – has become part of their own fabric. Justyna said she's looking forward to helping to provide food for the Thanksgiving lunch for the volunteer work crew on the Dutch Lane worksite. "We want to join them, to thank them, to be with them for the Thanksgiving lunch," she said.

That's just one of the "things" she's excited about now. Other "things" include the progress her two older children are making with their piano lessons now that they don't have to worry about disturbing their neighbors; having the money for children's activities because of savings from a utility bill that's half of what it used to be, and decorating the inside and outside of the house for the holiday. "Three school buses stop in front of our house so they'll all see our decorations," she said.

Marisol, too, is planning to decorate – outside. "I've decorated inside for the holidays but never had the opportunity to do it outside," she said. "That's something the kids and I are looking forward to."

For these hard-working and dedicated families, breaking bread this holiday season means a little bit more.

## Do you know your Bridgewater Habitat neighbors?

**One family immigrated to this country just seven years ago.**

**One working mom has been employed by the same company for over 20 years.**

**Five heads-of-household work in the healthcare industry.**

**One family has triplet boys who will soon turn two - Yikes!**

**One couple has a total of five part-time jobs to support the family.**

## From the Executive Director

*"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve"*  
– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Each spring, students at Warren Middle School hold a Walk-A-Thon, whose proceeds go to a charity of their choosing. This year RVHFH was the lucky recipient of their efforts. When I received the email telling us of the results I couldn't believe my eyes. I re-read the email to make sure I had gotten the total right before I shared it with the rest of the staff. The students of Warren Middle School raised over \$10,000 for the work of this affiliate! \$10K – that is 1/10th of a house sponsorship raised by children who are not even old enough to come build on our sites or serve on our committees!!

Thanks to all the children at the Warren Middle School who participated. You are GREAT!! I thank you for the \$10K, but want to thank you even more for reminding me that greatness isn't about how big or small, old or young you are when it comes to volunteering. It isn't even about how much money you donate or raise. As Martin Luther King said, it is about giving yourself: your time, your energy and your heart to help others.

Habitat for Humanity works because people from all walks of life serve side-by-side building houses in partnership with families in need. Habitat volunteers do much more than wear hard hats and swing hammers. RVHFH volunteers serve in all aspects of the work of the affiliate; without them we would not succeed. Thanks to ALL of our GREAT volunteers!!

Is greatness in your future? Come serve with us and find out!! Visit [www.rvhhabitat.org](http://www.rvhhabitat.org) to learn more about how you can volunteer.



Nancy Asbury,  
Executive Director



## A Day on the Site with...

### *Lincoln Shimomura*

*Even After More Than 10 Years of Volunteer Work, Retired Anesthesiologist Continues to Learn New Skills*

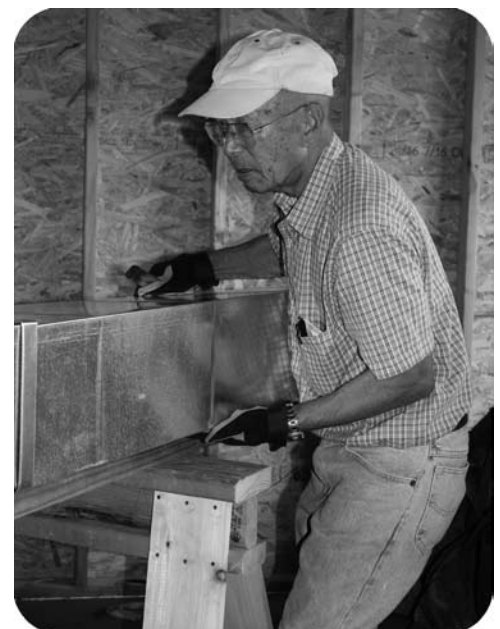
by Bob Baker

Thanks to the efforts of a number of dedicated volunteers, the new 9-home development known as the Dutch Lane Community on Southside Avenue in Bridgewater continues to take shape. One of those volunteers, Dr. Lincoln Shimomura, a retired anesthesiologist, spends Wednesdays and Thursdays working with construction tools and materials instead of the medical instruments to which he became accustomed during his career at Somerset Medical Center.

"I retired in 1998 and volunteered with Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity a year later," Dr. Shimomura recalls. "I had no special carpentry or other construction related skills, but was willing to learn. Now, with over ten years of on-the-job training under my belt, I can perform basic tasks using a hammer, a saw or a paintbrush. Even now, however, I'm still learning new skills as we continue to build these homes."

Dr. Shimomura continues to find his efforts rewarding. "Basically, I just show up on Wednesdays and Thursdays and do whatever needs to be done," he says. "It's a lot of hard work with a few sore muscles and maybe some pinched fingers, but watching the people who will occupy the homes working beside me and seeing the happiness in their faces when they finally take possession of them makes it all worthwhile."

The first two homes in the Dutch Lane Community development – one occupied by Marisol Sierra and her three children, the other by Witold and Justyna Buniowski with their five small children – were dedicated and turned over to their occupants on June 12.



## Construction Zone



Susan McGreevy (left) and friend enjoy the fresh air on a Women Build day.



Verizon-Cisco Team members raise a wall of the Harris home in July



Verizon's Kevin Shine and Otto Fontana work up a sweat for a good cause.



Maria Santye, (front left) RVHFH board member, joins employees of A. J. Santye and Co., an accounting and consulting firm located in Somerville on a recent build day.



Merck employees pause for a photo on a hot July build day.



Ethicon employees work on the foundation of 7 Dutch Lane that is sponsored by the Johnson & Johnson family of companies. Team building the Habitat Way!

## Community Outreach

### Golf outing



Kerry Bailey from Verizon and Marylou Maco from Cisco welcome the players after a morning of golf.

### Girls Night Out



On August 7, the Bridgewater Commons Mall sponsored a "Girls Night Out" fundraiser to benefit Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity. Among the "girls" are future Habitat homeowners Michelle Harris, Latecia Troy and Sandy Saunders (front row 2nd, 3rd and 4th from the left).

### Roman Jewelers Wedding Contest

Roman Jewelers Wedding Contestants Caroline Burghard and Karl Erikson are pictured at the Hunterdon County 4H Fair as they volunteer with Habitat to raise money and to build awareness with their Myths and Truths theme for RVHFFH.



### 5K Run



Habitat 5K Home Run Winner Rich Luettchan of Middlesex, NJ with a time of 16:16.96 celebrates his win with Lisa Fielding, Corporate & Community Relations Manager, RVHFFH. A beautiful fall day brought out a record crowd of runners and walkers including the Kids Fun Run participants who are all number one!



## Stories from the Heart

### *The Thigpen Family*



(from left to right) Darnell, Tarae, Jamar, Tre, Faith, Darnell Jr., Kazier

Through perseverance and hard work, the Thigpen family has come a very long way on the journey to realize their dream of owning a home. Husband and wife, Darnell and Tarae, and their four sons and a daughter, who range in age from 7 to 17, currently live in a 3-bedroom apartment. They live in a two family house apartment that can only be accessed from an outside stairwell. The four boys share two bedrooms and the daughter uses the family sitting room as her bedroom.

This apartment represents a large step up from previous living arrangements. For a period of two years, Tarae and two of the children lived in a shelter. Through faith and tenacity, Tarae and Darnell have improved their situation and provided a stable home for their children. To do that, Darnell works three part-time jobs as a retail salesperson and a church musician, and Tarae holds down two part-time jobs. As a two-adult family, the Thigpens are required to put in 500 hours of sweat equity in building homes and attending workshops, which they have completed! Merck is a proud sponsor of the Thigpen's new 1200 square foot home, located at 2 Dutch Lane in Bridgewater. The future is bright, indeed, for this hard-working family.

## ① HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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For information on volunteer opportunities or other ways to participate, visit our website at [www.rvhhabitat.org](http://www.rvhhabitat.org)

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## Overheard...



Homeowner Marisol Sierra's daughter Aida was so thrilled to have her very own large closet that she told her mom "I need a moment" and spent a few minutes alone in her closet with the door closed!



Melissa Sitrin (left) and daughter Carly on a Women Build Day. Melissa says "This will be my 5th year building and 1st year with Carly alongside me. There wasn't any bribery involved! I am passionate about this volunteer program, and the skills and friendships we acquire are life changing. To share this with her truly warms my heart." Carly agrees with her mom: "After watching my mom build with Habitat for four years I became inspired by the feelings of success and sheer joy that she came away with. It became a matter of counting down the days until my sixteenth birthday when I too could join the ranks of the powerful women who donate their time and energy to such a worthy cause. My first Women's Build was memorable and filled me with the same positive energy that I had always admired and now I cannot wait to get my friends involved and build again!"



Ashley Hobbs (leader of the GCU WILD- Georgian Court University Women in Leadership Development) on left. Mercedes Contreras on right. Ashley tells us "The seven hours of labor we put in on Saturday may have left us a bit sore or with an accidentally hammered finger or two, but more importantly it left us with sense of purpose higher than ourselves." Mercedes concurs "It really was an experience that I will never forget. I had so much fun doing something like this to help those families."