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Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity

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On a brisk November 8th morning, Habitat volunteers, Aventis, and church partners gathered to dedicate the nearly completed home of Olivia and Quincy Maxwell. After an invocation by the Reverend George Montanari of Middlebush Reformed Church, RVHFH Vice President Andy Aleff introduced Diana Pecina and Jerry Reynolds, who sang "Let's Build You a House." The song chronicled the building of a house through the eyes of a partner family and the volunteers who come together to help. Andy also recognized the efforts of Paul Ferguson, the architect from Minno and Wasko who designed the house. She noted that Paul's



Aventis sponsorship was made possible by the Aventis Foundation and corporate leadership. Some of the people who were key to the formation of this partnership were: (left to right) Evelyn Self, Mark Shaw, Amy Dupuis and Chip Rouse.

gift is one that will be used for other homes our affiliate will be building in the future.

Bob Zaborowski, Somerset County Freeholder and a frequent Habitat "hammer swinger", spoke of the partnership between RVHFH and the county, which provided funds to help purchase the land for the home.

Chip Rouse and Mark Shaw of Aventis discussed the partnership between their



Olivia Maxwell and her son Quincy, ready to show off their new home.

company and RVHFH, sharing that many of their suppliers provided building materials for the Maxwell house. Their generous gifts allowed Aventis' monetary gifts to go even further than originally expected because many of these supplies were available for use in the two other RVHFH homes being built on Alex Place. Mr. Shaw also noted that another unexpected benefit of this partnership was that so many of the Aventis volunteers came to work expecting to "give" and

realized that they were "receiving" as well.

After a litany led by Debra Chatman-Finley, Olivia Maxwell was welcomed to the podium by Ginny Krauss of the RVHFH Family Support Committee. Ginny presented Olivia with a home repair manual, followed by house warming gift presentations by RVHFH Board Members Paul Mehta and Jim Richart.

"Aventis volunteers came to work expecting to 'give' and realized that they were 'receiving' as well."

Upon cutting the ribbon to her new home, Olivia invited everyone to take a tour and enjoy the refreshments that were waiting inside. Joining the group of well-wishers were Olivia's soon-to-be neighbors, the Donaus and Fahmy families, who are anxiously awaiting the completion of their own homes down the street.

Welcome Home, Olivia and Quincy!!

- Maggie Chigi



Olivia receives the keys to her new home from Aventis employee, Mark Shaw.

Volunteer Spotlight

Finding the right site on which to build is crucial to the success of any new Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity construction project. This task is the responsibility of the Site Selection Committee, co-chaired by Claudia Elliott and Dave Maleski. Each committee member has his or her own personal expertise.

Claudia brings to the committee her extensive knowledge in real estate. A licensed realtor since 1972, Claudia was first introduced to Habitat for Humanity by a fellow realtor. Her initial volunteer efforts were on the computer and telephone, but she soon found herself working on the Site Selection Committee. That was three years ago.

Dave Maleski was also introduced to RVHFH by a fellow work associate. Dave works at Toll Brothers, Inc., as a residential house construction-project manager. There he is involved in the many phases of land development issues and applies that knowledge to questions involving RVHFH site selection. For the past year Dave has worked on "all issues that go along with making sites buildable" and "assessing whether properties should be pursued."

Through Dave and Claudia's expertise and efforts, they have been able to overcome site restrictions such as variances, zoning, price, and size, turning otherwise unworkable properties into homes.

Their efforts are given order and meaning through the organizational skills of Nina Davis. Nina, who has been involved with RVHFH for the past ten years, first volunteered as a fundraiser and grant writer and now serves as the Site Selection Committee secretary. Nina spends her winter months in Arizona, where she also lends her skills to a local Habitat chapter.

Nina's efforts help make the many contributions and decisions of the committee members more workable and clear-cut.

Claudia, Dave, and Nina are three vital members of the largest committee at RVHFH. Their volunteer efforts are applauded.

- Rebecca Schiller

Architect, Paul Ferguson of Minno & Wasko designed the home recently constructed in Franklin Township. He and his wife Tina were in attendance at the home dedication ceremony.



FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Affordable housing is an issue that we as a society must address. There is a need for affordable homes in New Jersey, but there is also a need for low-income rentals and senior housing as well. Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity addresses one of these needs, the need for affordable homes. Our mission is to provide decent, affordable homes for those people who would otherwise be unable to afford them. However, we face a unique challenge: Not only is New Jersey one of the most expensive states in the country to live in, but the area we serve (Hunterdon and Somerset counties) is the most expensive in our state. (See related article, "Did you know...")

As this issue goes to press, our chapter will be completing its 15th home. By year's end we will be nearing completion of our 16th and 17th homes, and we will have worked side by side with seventeen families in addressing the issue of affordable housing. Nonetheless, the lack of buildable, affordable land is our number one challenge.

As we look forward to completing additional homes in 2004, we find that building sites are our critical limiting factor. We must search more diligently and pay more than we have in the past for building sites.

Fortunately, our chapter is blessed with a talented, dedicated Site Selection Committee that is hard at work to find the sites we need, and there are a number of initiatives under way to find and purchase building sites. By the end of the year, we hope to be able to report the success of some of these initiatives so that we can continue our work toward the elimination of substandard housing.

Silvio Verdile

Did you know...

... a family now needs an annual income of \$46,560 to afford the fair-market rent of \$1,164 for a two bedroom apartment in Somerset or Hunterdon County?

This shocking statistic was published in the 2003 report of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Furthermore, the 2000 New Jersey census data show that over 25% of Somerset and Hunterdon County households fall below this income. Actually, the data show that 25% of households earn below \$45,000! It is sobering to realize that fully one-fourth of the households in such an affluent area struggle to find suitable homes.

These astounding facts emphasize even more, the need for decent, affordable housing – a need which RVHFH (with your help) will continue to address.

Empty and Abandoned...

This lot could be a dream come true for a needy family.

Land is vital to Habitat's mission. Without land, Habitat for Humanity's goal of eliminating substandard housing worldwide will be impacted. Unfortunately, the search for viable property has become a more and more difficult task in recent years. "The problem is that more land is not being created, but the need to build affordable housing continues to grow," says David Maleski, RFHFH Site Selection Committee co-chair. Land is not the limitless commodity it once was perceived to be. Increased development in Somerset and Hunterdon counties has contributed to the scarcity of land and the escalation of land costs. "Within the last five years, many of the lots we were bidding on were quickly purchased by small and medium

land developers," says Joe Palka of the committee. As a result, there are fewer lots available, and the cost of them has skyrocketed. The challenge of finding property for building Habitat homes is the task of the Site Selection Committee. This small group of volunteers is continually working to research, investigate, and acquire building sites. As land becomes more scarce and costly, the Site Selection Committee seeks out creative ways to find available lots. "We have many techniques for finding property for Habitat homes," says Joe Palka. "We can search the [real estate] Multiple Listings and even tax records to find potential properties. The committee works with

town governments that may have land with back taxes. Also, there are people who call in to donate land."

The Committee always appreciates any leads the community can offer in identifying potential building sites. "The more eyes out there, the better," says Dave Maleski. "We are [of course] open to donations. People can come forward with property that they own or are aware of. Land owned by towns or churches has potential. We can purchase a non-conforming lot and [apply for] variances to make it suitable." If YOU know of any available land, or if you want to help locate property to help fulfill Habitat's mission, please contact the Habitat office at 908-704-0016.

- Sarah Verbeke

BUILDING UPDATE

The building program continues to charge ahead toward finishing our work on the Alex Place homes in Franklin Township. At 21 Alex Place (the single-family ranch sponsored by Aventis), work is moving along well toward the November 8th dedication. The exterior siding and trim work, as well as interior walls have been completed. Now we will be turning our attention to the interior finish work, including doors, trim, plumbing, paint, and kitchen cabinets.

The duplex at 31 – 35 Alex Place is also coming along nicely. The roof, doors, windows, and porch decks have been completed. Coming next, are the siding and the rough in of the wiring, plumbing, and heating ducts. Once these items pass inspection, we can move on to insulation, sheet rock, and finish work.

Good weather and the willingness of our volunteers to work additional days during the week have helped us make good progress on these builds.

Our next project will be a ranch home in Lambertville. We are working with our architect to prepare for an early spring start on this home.

- Dick Carr

Antique Appraisals Benefit Habitat

When Della Nemes called the Stella Show Management Company to ask if we could sell raffle tickets at the Antiques Weekend at the Garden State Exhibit Center in Somerset on August 23 and 24, she did not know what a serendipitous phone call it would turn out to be.

Mrs. Stella, the owner of the company setting up the show, has been honoring her husband's memory by donating the antique appraisal fees from selected shows to Habitat for Humanity, Mr. Stella's favorite charity. Mrs. Stella not only allowed us to sell raffle tickets next

to the appraisal booth, but she donated the \$835 they collected for providing antique appraisals, to RVHFH! Attendees paid \$5 per article to receive a quick, verbal appraisal of their treasures. Steve Gelfand, the appraiser and friend of Mrs. Stella and her late husband, donated his time to appraise 167 articles.

Mrs. Stella and her staff "were absolutely the nicest people I have worked with (outside of the RVHFH office staff) in a LONG time!" said Amy Denecke, the chair for the event. "What an honor to be the beneficiary of their remembrance in Mr. Stella's honor."

In addition to the donation of \$835, ten volunteers sold 45 Raffle tickets at the event. Together, that's the equivalent of selling over 128 tickets. The Stella crew and our Habitat volunteers put the guiding principles of our mission into practice – working together to help others!

- Mindy Shanks



The Franklin Township home sponsored by Aventis being framed by Aventis employees.

Social at 6
Theater at 8

Dinner
Auction
Theater
Raffle

February 21, 2004

6 PM Dinner and Auction at Raritan Valley Community College
8 PM Theater Performance – *"I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change!"*
Raffle: Gourmet Dinner For Four at the elegant Ryland Inn in Whitehouse.

\$100 ticket includes – dinner, auction, theater performance and 1 raffle ticket.

- Enclosed is \$ _____ for _____ tickets @ \$100 each.
- Enclosed is \$ _____ for _____ raffle tickets @ \$10 each.
- I wish to place an ad in the program. Please contact me.

Name: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

Address: _____ City _____

I will be paying by: Check Visa Mastercard Exp. Date: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Signature: _____ Card # _____

Print name on card: _____

You must be 18 years old to enter raffle. Drawing will be held on February 21st during the event. You do not need to be present to win. Winner will be notified.

Mail to:
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Church Houses Others Before Self

A beautiful setting, delicious food, live music, and silent and live auctions combined to create another spectacular event, benefiting RVHFH's building programs. The Fourth Annual Christ Church Gala & Auction was held at Copper Hill Country Club in Ringoes on Saturday, October 25th.

Christ Church started out supporting RVHFH by supplying storage sheds for homes built by our affiliate and has continued to enforce its mission of service by coordinating and hosting this annual event - all this from a congregation that is still raising funds to build their own church!

Raritan Valley Habitat and our partner families want to thank Christ Church for its generous support and commitment to making a difference.

- Maggie Chigi

We Have A Winner!

After selling 1,150 tickets in just four months, the Fall Raffle Committee drew the winning tickets on Saturday, October 4th, at the Green Knoll Grille. The first prize winner, Tabitha Doughty of Lambertville, was excited to learn that she was the new owner of the Sony 42: Plasma Flatscreen HDTV System. The second place prize, an RCA X-Surround Audio Shelf System, went to Dana Santye of Skillman.

Tabitha purchased her ticket at the Ethnic Festival at St. John the Evangelist RC Church in Lambertville. St. John's was one of the many locations where over 30 Habitat volunteers sold raffle tickets and enlisted volunteers. Throughout the summer, these Habitat supporters sold tickets at the Classic Car Nights in Somerville, the Wine Tasting Event at the Nassau Raquet and Tennis Club in Montgomery, the NJ Festival of Ballooning in Readington, the Antiques Weekend at the Garden State Exhibit Center, the Manville Street Fair and the Branchburg Country Fair.

After the prizes had been awarded and the donations counted, Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity realized a profit of over \$13,000 with which to assist the families who come to us seeking decent, affordable, housing.

Special recognition goes to the Habitat committee members who were the top ticket sellers. Mindy Shanks (and the Shanks Team) sold 88 tickets. Next in line was Joan Jenkoski who sold 61 tickets, Sarah Verbeke (49), Sue Haake (42) and Sharon Huard (40). Thanks also to Amy Denecke who tracked the ticket sales and who helped set up and sell tickets at many of the ticket selling venues.

The Raffle Committee says **THANK YOU** to all who bought and sold tickets and made contributions to make this our most successful raffle yet!

- Liz Kepniss



Winner, Tabitha Doughty (right) with Pam Ely, RVHFH Executive Director.

Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity Newsletter is published by Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity, Inc., an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, a non-profit, international Christian organization based in Americus, GA, that builds decent low-cost housing for hardworking low-income families in over 1700 locations in the U.S. and Canada and 76 other nations worldwide. Habitat is supported by volunteers and contributions from churches, businesses and individuals.

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