Emerald Hollow Community Grows

Judy Soldo said she can summarize in one word the feeling of owning a home. “Awesome.” George and Judy Soldo, with their son Gregory, moved into their new home February 22. What’s awesome? “Having our own home, the area, the people around us. They just finished our backyard. My son loves his new school.”

The Soldos are homeowners through the Habitat for Humanity program, which requires the homeowner to work 500 sweat equity hours on their home as a down payment, and offers a zero-interest mortgage. Their new neighbor, Amy Esch, with her son Matt and her daughter Abigail moved into Emerald Hollow in February 23. Amy is a homeowner through the Interfaith Housing partnership with Habitat, which requires the homeowner to work 100 hours on their home and to secure a low-interest mortgage.

Amy said she’s enjoying decorating her new home. “I can do whatever I want with paint and colors. That is really nice. It’s good to know that when I’m paying the mortgage, I’m not throwing the money away.”

The Soldos and the Esches moved into the second of eight clusters of homes in the Emerald Hollow community. The two families spent hundreds of hours working on their new homes, and their integration with the community was apparent at the dedication ceremony, before they moved in.

“T he essence of the neighborhood is having the kids play together while the parents stand around and gab,” said Stefanie Clark, family program director. That’s what happened after dedication Feb. 22.

Natalie Argue, Abigail Esch, Melanie and Moriah Chase were all playing with one another in Amy Esch’s home. Gregory Soldo went to the Chase’s to play with the boys there.

“And the best part is that it’s not done yet,” Stefanie said. Emerald Hollow is scheduled to be completed in 2004 with a total of 37 townhomes.

“As we welcome several new families to this peaceful community, it becomes increasingly apparent that we are building so much more than houses,” said Director Trish Kriger. “We are building lifelong relationships that stretch far beyond the 37 families who will eventually live in Emerald Hollow. The beautiful homes dedicated today are only one testament to what those relationships can build.”

Paul Landes, Habitat Bucks president, Jim Petruzzi, executive director, and Trish Kriger, welcomed the group gathered for the dedication ceremony at 3 p.m. Rev. Rebecca Stephens, First United Church of Christ offered the invocation. Rev. Bernie Kelly, St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church introduced the families. Bill Tuszynski, family selection committee chair and Habitat board member, presented the Esch family their key and Bible. John Brown, Chair of District 14A Lions Habitat Project, Lions Club International, presented the Soldo family with their key and Bible. Habitat recognized a number of special people who have contributed their efforts to making this community a strong, thriving place to live. Dorothy Chase received the Community Leader award. Michael Fitzpatrick received the Leadership in Affordable Housing Award. Ray Luszczak received the Board Award for Leadership. Dan Kendra received the Excellent Service Award. Nick Grant received the Volunteer Leadership Award. Awards also went to site volunteers-of-the-month Maureen XXX and Diane XXX.

Following the award presentations, Rev. Stephens offered the dedication and benediction, and Mikaela Martin, marketing-public relations director, offered guests the opportunity to leave a welcome note for each family in the journals provided on their kitchen...
Carolena Boyce had never been on a roof before Tuesday, March 18. She usually isn't afraid of heights and describes herself as a daredevil, but the slope of the roof on Cluster Three was a lot for her to handle. "I had to tilt my body to walk," she said. "Molly held my hand and told me I was all right." By the end of two hours, Carolena had helped nail shingles and had conquered the fear she said was "all mental." Carolena was working at Emerald Hollow with a group of schoolmates and chaperones from Miss Porter's School in Farmington, CT. The group devoted their spring break to working on homes in Cluster Three. The previous week, a group from the Baptist Student Union of the University of North Carolina, Wilmington was on the same mission: to use spring break to do something good for someone else. The students made a significant advance toward meeting the construction deadline on Cluster Three, and in the process, they built a community among themselves.

"Our first group was from North Carolina. They were incredibly enthusiastic," said Kelly Hile, youth coordinator with Habitat Bucks. "Everyone was welcoming and warm to them, from the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church where they stayed, to a person they met at the YMCA who belonged to the local branch of their church and gave them a home-cooked meal."

"With Miss Porter's, a group of young women, it's a thrill to see them feel powerful—carrying around large pieces of wood and climbing on roofs," Kelly said. "They come for the whole week, so they have a lot of room to grow. This gives me the opportunity to see it."

The students' reflections on their week in Bucks County include stories of overwhelming generosity, personal growth and meeting new people they will never forget. Collegiate Challenge is a program through Habitat for Humanity International that connects XXX students around the nation each year with Habitat affiliates to increase education about affordable housing issues and to bring financial support and volunteer labor to the affiliates.
Lions Clubs Sponsor Homes for Families with Disabilities

Lions Clubs International secured a $60,000 grant for three homes in Emerald Hollow for families with disabilities. The Lions Clubs of Bucks, Philadelphia and Delaware counties have contributed $40,000 to the Emerald Hollow community.

The Lions-Habitat partnership joins the efforts of the two organizations to provide the opportunity for homeownership to persons and families affected by serious disabilities.

Santos Rivera, Lions District 14-A governor and Ted Fusco, Lions past international director, presented a check to Paul Landes, president of Habitat Bucks. “Partnerships like this one are very important to the families of Habitat for Humanity,” Paul said. “This particular program is doubly exciting, because in addition to creating safe, decent housing for people in need, we will also help families with disabled members. This will no doubt further enrich an already diverse community. It is a very rewarding endeavor to everyone involved, and very much appreciated by Habitat and the families we serve.”

Through local fundraising efforts, local Lions Clubs and Habitat Bucks each matched 50% of the funds provided by Lions International. Habitat is responsible for providing the land, construction materials and a family to receive the Lions sponsorship. Three families have been selected for homes within the Lions-Habitat partnership; two homes have been completed and families have taken occupancy.

Thank You Notes

Volunteers for the first quarter of 2003 totaled XXX, accumulating XXX hours on site. Thank you for showing your support for the Emerald Hollow and Habitat Bucks community.

Brandon Whitmire, 12, filled welcome baskets, complete with wrapping and ribbons, for the new families of Cluster Two. Brandon worked on the baskets for his confirmation project through St. Isidore’s Catholic Church in Quakertown.

The sixth grade class of Mr. Steven Cashman, John Barclay Elementary School, welcomed the families into their new homes with a house banner, built of paper bricks decorated in the theme “What Makes a House a Home?”

Doylestown United Methodist Church held a silent auction in March??, and donated $10,000 to Habitat Bucks. The church also supports Emerald Hollow with a monthly workgroup at the site.

Thank you to these groups for providing site volunteers with lunch during the first quarter of 2003: Assumption BVM Church, Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, CVS/Pharmacy, Domino’s, GE Betz, Kehilat Hanahar, Penns Park United Methodist Church, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Venturing Crew I.

Last call for holiday card designs…

Use your talent and creativity to represent the mission of Habitat Bucks. Your painting could be displayed as the 2003 holiday card for Habitat for Humanity of Bucks County. This year’s holiday card will be chosen in July by committee vote. Bring your original artwork to the Habitat office at 340 N. Broad St., Doylestown, on or before June 31. We will not consider submissions received after the deadline. If your work is selected, it becomes property of Habitat for Humanity of Bucks County and will be recognized as an in-kind donation. Artists whose artwork is not chosen will be contacted by mail, and may collect their submission at the Habitat office.

Get out your paintbrushes and show us what you’ve got!
Thank You
AmeriCorps Volunteers!

by Trish Kriger

As I quickly approach my one year anniversary with Habitat for Humanity of Bucks County, I find myself reflecting on an incredible journey of the last several months, thankful that I was given this opportunity to meet and work with so many committed, kind and selfless people. I am in awe of the dedication of our staff, families, volunteers and business partners, each contributing their special talents, each playing a vital role in our mission and each deserving of special recognition.

On June 28th we will be celebrating the dedication of six more homes and the amazing efforts of all of our staff, families, volunteers and business partners. Among those is a very special group of people without whom Emerald hollow would not be possible.

Our AmeriCorps and VISTA volunteers commit a year or more of service to our affiliate. They leave behind the security of their own home and family, to build new homes and dreams for others. Their unique contributions are inspiring and the affiliate wishes to thank each of them for their tireless efforts and dedication during their service.

For your commitment, faith and perseverance, thank you.

To Joe who will complete his second year of service in September, for your commitment, faith and perseverance, thank you.

To Katie who will return to Oregon in August, for your energy, your willingness to try anything and your smile, thank you.

To Kelly who joined us in January, for your vision, optimism and creativity, thank you.

To Molly who will be going home to family and friends in July, for your laughter, motivation and friendship, thank you.

To Robin who has committed to a second year of service, for your patience, diligence and song, thank you.

You all have made an incredible difference in the lives around you. We are so fortunate to have you as part of our Habitat family!

WALLY AND JEAN DOLAN know when the work day begins and ends at Emerald Hollow. They can hear the hammers hitting the nails from their home in Milford Township, and they sometimes think they should be there helping. Many days, they are helping, either on site or within the Upper Bucks community. The Dolans have been a part of the Habitat Bucks family since April 2002, beginning with Cluster One.

Wally and Jean, both in their early 70s, wanted to travel with Caravaners and volunteer at Habitat affiliates across the nation. “It was our intention to take our vacations and work, but a few things happened that we couldn’t get out,” Jean said. “When we heard about Emerald Hollow, we said, ‘oh, we’ll do that.’” They have put up soffet, walls, stairs, cabinets and insulation. They’ve also done touch-up painting and caulking. And when the cluster was completed, Wally played Santa, delivering candy canes to the children at Emerald Hollow.

“It has been a wonderful experience for both of us,” Jean said. “We’ve enjoyed our time and met some wonderful people.”

Alongside their volunteer work in construction, Wally and Jean have contributed to Habitat Bucks with a whatever-you-need attitude. They have secured donations from Ollie’s and Sears and Wal-Mart to provide tools for the construction crews. The junior construction team that worked on the bird house blitz build in March sipped hot cocoa served by the Dolans. Wally and Jean also worked the registration table for the event. Jean said, “We had so much fun. The little ones were so excited about what they were doing.”

Wally and Jean share an enthusiasm for serving the Bucks County community, in which they’ve lived 33 years. “In a sense, we’ve been volunteers a long time,” Wally said. He volunteered with the Richland Township Area Shelly Fire Co. Fire and Rescue Team. Jean volunteered with the Fire Police. Both served on the ambulance crew.

Thank you Wally and Jean for your tremendous gift to our community!

JEFF MILLMAN of Feasterville has been a part of Habitat Bucks since June 2000. He has followed us from Bristol to the upper portion of the county because he believes in the habitat home ownership program.

Jeff is President of Millman Electric Co. Inc., located in Feasterville. A contractor in Yardley, Tom Mack, indirectly introduced Jeff to Habitat. When Jeff found out that a builder he respects supports Habitat, he looked into the organization.

“When I got into Habitat for Humanity, I was impressed with the way people get involved,” Jeff said, adding that putting sweat equity into one’s home sets the Habitat program apart from some of the government-funded homes he wired for electricity when he was a teenager. He was discouraged when he saw the government houses trashed six months later.

Jeff donated approximately 25% of his labor and materials on Clusters One and Two.

“Dorothy Chase’s mother worked at Summit Electric,” Jeff said. “She was like my mother. I felt I owed a lot to these people for helping me out.”

Jeff said that his business has been busy since the day he went out on his own in 1998. “I felt very blessed.”

The support that Jeff has showed Habitat is overwhelming. Director Trish Kriger said, “Jeff has been working diligently on both material and trying to put together electrical professionals to donate their time to the project (including securing the electrical inspector). He also organized an electrical blitz build on Cluster Three. He is always accommodating and a terrific ambassador for Habitat.”
WELCOMING...

Katie Hughes transferred from the Boston Habitat affiliate to work in Trumbauersville. She was experiencing cabin fever in the office environment and wanted to do more building. Her friend from Portland, OR and one of our AmeriCorps staff, Molly Mattecheck, called Katie in December and told her we had an opening on the construction crew. Katie was here by February.

“I came right before [Cluster Two] dedication, so that was fun. I worked a week, and then experienced the reward of seeing families move into their homes,” Katie said.

She’s here to “have fun,” and she said, “I don’t think there will be another time in my life when I can do this, volunteer my time.”

After Steve Argue and his family move into their new home this summer, Steve will walk about 20 steps from his front door to work. The Argues have been part of the Habitat Bucks family since fall 2002, when they were selected as homeowners in Emerald Hollow. In February, Steve also joined the construction crew.

The Habitat work site doesn’t stop, come snow, sleet, rain or hail, which brings Steve the steady work he lacked at his previous jobs. “I was looking for a change from pre-framing construction,” he said. “This is a totally new field, and I’m learning as I go. We worked on my garage yesterday.”

Loren Bishop is a former AmeriCorps member, who served at Habitat affiliate in Columbus, GA. When his term was over, he moved back to this area and started looking for a steady position, while volunteering his time at Emerald Hollow. In January, he accepted a full-time position with the construction crew.

He says Habitat is different from the side jobs he’s done in electrical finishing and construction. “I really enjoy the crew here,” Loren said. “It’s neat to be able to relax and learn. Everyone else out there is out to make a buck.”

At home, he teaches youth volunteers and adults to do construction. “The most rewarding part about is watching someone do something I just taught them,” he said.

Having been used to the one-story homes he built in Georgia, Loren’s had to learn the art of scaling the roofs at Emerald Hollow.

“Working the edges requires a little more adrenaline.”

Kelly Hile joins Habitat Bucks as the youth coordinator. Kelly spent the past two years in Namibia, Africa, where she worked in education through the Peace Corps. While she was there, she also revived her love for running, and completed her first marathon with some of her Peace Corps coworkers.

As her term was ending, Kelly searched for AmeriCorps opportunities in Pennsylvania to return and transition to American life. “I gave half way around the world, but never in my own country,” Kelly said. “I respected Habitat for Humanity, and when I learned about the youth coordinator job, it seemed I had the skills they needed and they had the environment I was looking for. It felt like it was meant to happen.”

As Kelly continues to develop the youth program, she is working to establish more service options for different age groups throughout the year. She is also using this year as an AmeriCorps* VISTA to decide whether she wants to make her career in the non-profit world.

“I hope this will show me what the office is like. I’ve always had jobs on my feet, in retail or teaching,” Kelly said.

Sam Martin comes to Habitat Bucks with 25 years of community service experience and the enthusiasm one possesses when making a career change. Sam worked for 15 years as Assistant Librarian at Souderton High School, and she has recently accepted the position of Office Manager, previously held by Mikaela Martin, who is moving to Marketing-PR Director.

Sam said, “Because this affiliate is going through so much growth, this position is very exciting to me. It affords me to meet a lot of interesting people and work for an organization that I’ve always admired.”

Sam is turning her life-long sense of giving back to her community into a career. From the Indian Valley Arts Association to the Souderton Fire House and so many other organizations, she has received a lot of enjoyment. “I’ve always tried to instill that spirit in [my daughters] Mikaela and Brooke. I would make them come serve breakfast with me at the Souderton Fire House when I was in the Ladies Auxiliary.”

Habitat Bucks extends a warm welcome to these new members of our growing family.
Ten-Year-Old Gives Birthday Present to Habitat Bucks

Alex Leininger displays the money he raised for Habitat.

From the Ground Up—the Premiere

Feeling like Hollywood stars, the extended family of Habitat Bucks received the red-carpet treatment from the County Theater and the Blue 52 in Doylestown. The April 3 premiere of From the Ground Up, a PBS Visionaries series featuring Habitat for Humanity of Bucks County, was enjoyed by Habitat families, volunteers, staff, boards of directors and advisors, partners and guests.

Todd Hendricks, CEO of T.H. Properties and sponsor of From the Ground Up, appeared as the guest speaker to introduce the film. “It’s been a privilege for us to be involved,” Todd said. “We are huge fans of Habitat for Humanity. We build hundreds of homes a year, but there’s nothing more gratifying than seeing someone’s life changed forever.”

From the Ground Up tells the stories of three Habitat families, the Chases, the Besses and the Kolodubs, and it shows the support of the community, including the Tusavitzes, from whom Habitat bought the property now named Emerald Hollow. Thank you to our wonderful hosts: the County Theater donated the space used to show the film and refreshments. The Blue 52 welcomed guests to a private party after the show.

A schedule for Visionaries is available at www.visionaries.org.

Habitat for Humanity of Bucks County

OUR MISSION: To build affordable homes, better lives, stronger families and safer communities through partnerships with people and organizations throughout Bucks County.