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Habitat for Humanity Turns Dreams into Reality

by Sean A. Stinnett



Habitat for Humanity, along with former President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn, have changed dreams into reality for Tymeerah Butts and Lisa Griffin. They are two of the 10 Baltimore families becoming homeowners through the organization.

The overall mission of the Habitat for Humanity is to eliminate poverty and homelessness from the world and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action. These new homes are built using volunteer labor and are sold at affordable rates rather than to make a profit. This policy has been in place since 1986.

So far in the Baltimore area, Habitat is building more and more homes every year. The organization has built 30 homes this year and is expected to build at least 40 residences in 2011. Overall, Habitat has helped more than 105 families build their new homes in the past five years.

Tymeerah Butts, center, listens to a Habitat volunteer as former President Jimmy Carter works on his part of the building. (AFRO Photo/Bill Tabron)

Griffin, a mother of two, was introduced to the organization by a co-worker who felt she could benefit from the program. She'd talked about her displeasure of having a landlord and wanted to own a home in the near future.

The process is very simple when going through the selection process. The Habitat committee chooses homeowners based on their level of need, willingness to become partners in the program and ability to repay the loan. Noted by Habitat, every affiliate follows a nondiscriminatory policy of family selection. Neither race nor religion is a factor in choosing the families who receive Habitat houses.

When asked what being approved for a Habitat home means, Griffin said, "everything."

"This is a new beginning for me and my family but the excitement will not hit me until I walk into the house. Once I started the program, I had to cut down on extra expenses and start thinking and spending like a home owner," she added.

Griffin also said the process was like other programs that require credit checks, but found the homeowner workshops to be a unique component.

“They showed you how to get a house and keep it by managing your money properly,” Griffin said. “This program was the best thing for me in purchasing a new home. I have already told a few of my friends about it.”

As for Butts, the excitement is overwhelming. “Coming into this program was the best thing for me and my situation. Habitat had placed us in a series of workshops where you learn about homeownership, planning a budget for your expenses, house insurance, and all of the other necessary information you need to know in owning a home.”

She said the overall process is not very long but it is worth the wait. “I’m looking to possibly go to closing on my new house in January.”

The organization was founded in 1976 in Americus, Ga. by Millard and Linda Fuller and Clarence Jordan. They all thought of the idea of the Fund for Humanity. In 1968, they began to work in building homes and sell them to families at no profit or interest which started the foundation of Habitat for Humanity.

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter have worked with the organization since 1984 when traveling to New York City with the first project of their own, the Jimmy Carter Work Project. In 2008, Habitat for Humanity celebrated the 25th annual building project with the Carters and renamed it to include Mrs. Carter; the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project.

Now, according to Habitat, the Carters have greatly helped Habitat for Humanity of the Chesapeake raise more than \$800,000 and have given the organization far more exposure than they ever had before. Additionally, it has allowed them to build long-term relationships they hadn’t embraced before the Carters became involved.

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