

A beacon of hope shines in Baltimore

By Susan Dunn-Lisuzzo



The pounding of hammers and the whirl of a saw, heard half a block away, were the sounds of progress on Baltimore, Maryland's Jefferson Street as volunteers gave a final push before the end of the Carter Work Project.

President and Mrs. Carter would be pleased to know that all the windows are installed in Tymeerah Butts' soon-to-be home in East Baltimore. On Tuesday, the Carters built the window sill and trim in the downstairs window.

Rodney Payne, the Jefferson Street project manager at Habitat for Humanity of the Chesapeake, is cautiously optimistic that the house will be finished in a month, although he doesn't "want to jinx it," he said. "We are ahead of schedule." Ten volunteers were hard at work inside the row home, finishing the interior trim after hanging all the doors. Next, the kitchen cabinets will be installed.

Volunteer Sonoroa Moss sorts reusable bricks from house No. 4 on the fourth day of work in the Jefferson Street neighborhood of Baltimore ©Habitat for Humanity/Gregg Pachkowski

Butts' house stands as a beacon of hope to all the Habitat partner families who are not as far along the road to completion. The good news is that after all the hard work, the grime and the sweat, a new home awaits.

Hope for the future



"Today's my day off," said Lisa Griffin. "Any free day I can get I come up." Today she earns sweat-equity hours demolishing walls and ceilings on what will soon be her home on Jefferson Street. Griffin hopes to be in her house by April and is determined to complete her sweat-equity hours soon.

Griffin is not new to Baltimore; she grew up and raised her children here. When asked if she has seen any changes to this neighborhood over the years, she replied, "A lot. This particular block—five years ago it was terrible."

In this area, a safe, stable block may be just one street over from a desolate, crime-ridden block. "Hopefully the whole area will be good soon," Griffin said.

Habitat homeowner partner Lisa Griffin removes demolition debris from one of the 10 row houses being rehabilitated in Baltimore. ©Habitat for Humanity/Gregg Pachkowski



A love of volunteering

Sharon Harris, a daily presence on the work site, wasn't a scheduled Habitat volunteer this week. "I saw the activity going on, and I came over," she said. She has helped daily with registering volunteers and serving lunch. What is her favorite part of this week's activities? "I had my picture taken with President Carter. I loved it."

Harris, who is receiving government housing assistance after suffering a stroke, plans to attend a Habitat partner family orientation Tuesday. If she is accepted into the program, Harris won't be intimidated by the rehab work. In 1999, she participated in the Living Classroom Foundation hands-on education program, where rehab work was included. After peering into a home where volunteers were hard at work, Harris exclaimed, "Oh my goodness, I know what to do."

Jefferson Street resident and volunteer Sharon Harris serves lunch at the build site in Baltimore. Harris wasn't scheduled to volunteer but came to the work site every day, and now she plans to attend a Habitat partner family orientation.
©Habitat for Humanity/Gregg Pachkowski

"I like what they are doing for the community," Harris said. "It's settled down along here now; there used to be a lot of drug traffic."

Looking forward to new neighbors

Danaye Roles stood on the steps of his rented row house, surveying the activity on Jefferson Street. His 4-year-old niece, still in her school uniform from morning classes, talked to volunteers as they passed. When asked if she likes all the activity in her neighborhood, she smiled from ear-to-ear while nodding, her ponytails bouncing back and forth.

Roles, a Baltimore firefighter and paramedic, has lived on Jefferson Street for a year. Even with all the noise, Roles said he thinks he'll like the result. "It will be nice to see the eyesores gone," he said, "and it will be nice to have new neighbors."

Roles has the option to purchase the home he is renting, but he has "been waiting to see what happens in the neighborhood first." All signs indicate that things are looking up.

Susan Dunn-Lisuzzo is national communications manager for Habitat for Humanity International.