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Volunteers in the News

New Homes Coming to Clay Street

More than 100 volunteers gave their time and efforts this weekend.

By Teresa McMinn | October 10, 2010



Pete Cox smiled while he talked about a challenge that most non-profits would love to have: Too many volunteers.

Cox, a project manager for Habitat for Humanity of the Chesapeake, supervised more than 100 workers with various skill levels that helped construct 10 new houses on Clay Street in Annapolis on Saturday.

Saturday's efforts were part of the 2010 Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project, which kicked off earlier in the week and included a visit to Annapolis from the Carters.



Cox said that although many of Saturday's volunteers started with little or no experience, they were fast learners.

"You do get a broad range," Cox said of workers that included several members of the Stevenson University men's lacrosse team. "It just amazes me how quickly people pick stuff up. If you take the time to show it to them . . . they're almost proficient by the end of the day."

Cox said he was also impressed that the volunteers gave up their Saturday to work during the town's annual boat show and Navy football game. Habitat has a waiting list of folks who want to work on Annapolis projects, he said.

"They want to help their neighbors," Cox said. "I just love the way people get engaged . . . There's a great camaraderie, fellowship that grows out of it."

The new houses will occupy a significant space, said Karen Swisher, Habitat for Humanity of the Chesapeake's major gifts manager.



"This is a very historic area of Annapolis," she said and added that at one time, Clay Street was known as the Harlem of the mid-Atlantic and was home to jazz and comedy legends such as Pearl Bailey.

Jayna Powell, faith relations director for Habitat for Humanity of the Chesapeake, said the project also included an interfaith group of volunteers from local churches, a synagogue and mosque.

"In all of our coalitions are many congregations that have been supporting Habitat for many years," she said.

Wanda Mitchell, 53, watched the various volunteers work on the houses and said she wished she could swing a hammer and help.



But Mitchell, the future owner of one of the Clay Street homes, is scheduled to undergo hip replacement surgery brought on by drugs she was given after a heart transplant roughly two years ago.

Prior to the transplant, she was accepted into the Habitat program and to log her sweat equity hours -- which are required for all Habitat homeowners -- she worked as a sales clerk in a store that sold used building supplies for the organization in Pasadena.

At that time, she required a pace maker, defibrillator and several other medical devices to keep her alive. She's also helped to promote Habitat's message by telling her story to religious groups.

Now, she looks forward to her new home.

"I'm so emotional. Not because of what I'm getting, but because of Habitat," she said and added that she plans to volunteer to help the organization in the future for as long as she can. "I'm never gonna quit Habitat."

Photo Credit: Credit Teresa McMinn

