



Fauquier Habitat For Humanity:

By Sean Broderick

Two decades ago, finding a Fauquier County family living in a house with no running water, no electricity, or dirt floors – or, worse yet, without a home at all – was maddeningly easy. In fact, there were more than 300 of them.

As 2011 arrives, finding substandard living conditions in the community is still possible. Thanks in large part to the tireless efforts of Fauquier Habitat For Humanity, however, the problem has been significantly reduced.

Fauquier Habitat marks its 20th anniversary in 2011, and the organization has much to celebrate. The raw statistics are impressive enough: 40 houses built and sold to qualified families, and 38 of them still in the original family's possession. (The other two were transferred due to an owner's death and a career change necessitating a relocation, meaning that Fauquier Habitat entered 2011 with a perfect record of picking families who could both afford and care for their new homes.) Fauquier Habitat also rehabilitated a number of homes for other community families in need—something it does on occasion, but only when certain conditions are met.

Numbers alone don't convey the extent of Habitat's success, however. In each of the 40 instances where it has given a family a hand up, Fauquier Habitat also has strengthened its community by solving a family's housing challenge, and helping the new homeowners become positive contributors to their local neighborhoods and their region.

"Each project we take on has one defining goal: create something that is good for everyone—our homeowners and the homeowners around them," said Fauquier Habitat Executive Director Brenda

Drenerberger. "We work hard to ensure our projects are positive contributions for the families, our community, and Habitat."

Nor does Habitat give away housing. A common misconception is that it's a charity organization that provides handouts to the underprivileged. While Habitat is a not-for-profit organization (a tax exempt 501(c)(3) one, to be precise), its purpose is not to provide a hand out, but rather a hand up to those in need.

Habitat For Humanity describes itself as an ecumenical Christian ministry dedicated to the mission of providing simple, decent, affordable housing for all of God's people in need. Despite its Christian roots, the organization doesn't factor religion into its family selection process—it provides homes for those with all faiths, and even no faith.

Habitat also is wedded to the conviction that recipients of its homes must both qualify for them and earn them. Qualification is based on financial factors such as income (families must earn enough to make the required mortgage, insurance and utility payments, for instance) credit ratings (those burdened by heavy debt or spotty repayment histories aren't likely to be approved) and a demonstrated need to escape substandard and/or overcrowded housing conditions. Each family is interviewed by two Habitat For Humanity representatives, as part of the qualification process.

If all goes well, the family is accepted into the program—and then the real work begins. Each adult family member must take classes related to homeownership, such as financial management and home maintenance. Each family also must perform 400 hours of volunteer work.

"Every homeowner must put in a certain amount of hours of sweat equity," said Priscilla Chamlee, a long-time volunteer and

supporter as well as a former President of the Fauquier Habitat Board of Directors. "It's time they have to spend on Habitat efforts, on both their own home and other people's houses."

Once all the qualifications are met and requirements fulfilled, a Habitat family acquires its home—and then, just like for every other new homeowner, mortgage payments start.

"It's truly a program. It's not just 'you're going to get the house,'" said Melba Hendrix, a former Fauquier Habitat board member and Partnership Committee chairperson. Added Drenerberger: "We are not the landlords. You are going to own your own house. Nobody else is going to have a set a keys—it's yours."

Candidates for Fauquier Habitat homes vary widely. Many live in substandard housing, without basics like indoor plumbing. Others, like Faye Walker, were homeless.

Walker was born in Manassas and came to Fauquier in 1995. In 2003, her young son became ill. The resulting financial and emotional strain forced her to seek temporary shelter for her son, her daughter, and herself. It was during her time at Fauquier's Victory Transitional Housing program that she first became aware of Fauquier Habitat.

Walker applied, and Fauquier Habitat accepted her family into the program in 2004. And while her home would not be ready for several years—it is part of Fauquier Habitat's Sterling Court project and is slated to be dedicated in March 2011—she immediately began to fulfill her commitments as a future Habitat homeowner.

"I took lots of workshops and classes," Walker explained. "I learned how to hammer nails. I took financial management classes, landscaping classes, home maintenance and even a tax information class."



20 Years Of Hands-up

She also put in many hours on other Fauquier Habitat homes. Soon, it was time to put her newly learned construction skills to work on her own home. "I went down one day and there was a Bobcat sitting there" getting ready to clear the spot for her home, Walker recalled. "I went down another day, and the foundation was poured. It is something that you can not even imagine."

Once accepted into the program, Habitat families receive ongoing support from the Partnership Committee, which Hendrix called "the heart and soul of Habitat for Humanity." The committee provides real-

world partners that help families with any challenges they face.

"If they've got problems, if they've got questions, if they've got needs, they'll go to their family partner," said Hendrix. "That covers everything from home care to living with neighbors."

Officially, Habitat families keep partners for one year after move-in, but Hendrix said the reality is a bit different here. "In Fauquier, we keep them forever," she said.

Walker, the soon-to-be Sterling Court homeowner, praised the partnership program for its ability to unite seemingly different

worlds. "You start this walk with this person that you would probably not cross paths with in any other way," Walker said. "This person is not only your partner, but they become your friend and your extended family."

Walker's partners are long-time Fauquier Habitat volunteers Jerri and Gary Schoenfeld. While Walker's dedication is just around the corner, she expects to share her journey with the Schoenfelds for a long time to come.

"Once your house gets built, your partner does not step back," Walker said, drawing

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Women Build Effort Strengthens Fauquier Habitat For Humanity

Fauquier Habitat For Humanity's success is due in large part to help it receives from many local organizations, like churches and civic groups. One of its biggest and most enthusiastic sources of support comes from within its own volunteer ranks.

Women Build home in 2005, explained Krista Coyner, co-chair of Fauquier's Women Build organization. "It was such a fantastic experience for all those that participated that when the opportunity to build again was presented to the group in 2008, we accepted the challenge."

The Women Build volunteers do more than swing hammers and raise walls. They immerse themselves in the entire Habitat project process from start to finish, Coyner noted. "We began planning fundraisers and, with the support of the community, local civic groups and churches, we were able to raise the funds needed to build a second Women Build home," she said.

"Women Build provides a chance for women to develop construction skills in a non-intimidating atmosphere, which is what attracted me in the beginning," added Kim Cybulski, who also co-chairs Fauquier Women Build. "They can gain more confidence in this area while giving a family a helping hand, literally!"

Coyner noted that while men may not do

the building, they do lend helping hands. "While we say 'Women Build,' it would not be possible without the guidance of our male volunteers who agree to check their tool belts at the door and teach us the tasks necessary for the job of building," she said.

Coyner said that more than 40 women worked on the two Women Build houses, and the group is making plans for a third build. Women interested in joining the effort are welcome to come to the group's monthly meetings, on the first Thursday of each month at 6:30pm at Fauquier Habitat For Humanity's offices at 34 Beckham Street in Warrenton. Information also is available by contacting womenbuild@fauquierhabitat.org or by calling (540)341-4952.

"The bonds formed while working towards our goals, including fundraising, events, and the actual building phases, result in lasting friendships with great people," Cybulski said. "We're always looking to share this experience with more women. It's great to be around very caring people who share a common goal."



Women Build is Habitat for Humanity's volunteer program for women who want to learn construction skills and make a difference in their communities. Fauquier Habitat for Humanity completed its first

upon her observations made during her nearly seven years as a Fauquier Habitat volunteer and homeowner-to-be. “They become a lifetime friend.”

Habitat for Humanity International was founded in 1976 by Millard and Linda Fuller. The Fullers helped create a concept termed “partnership housing” at a small Christian community near Americus, Georgia that they frequented. Inspired by its success, the Fullers created the formula that drives Habitat today: houses are built at no profit and interest is not charged on the loans. Building costs are financed by a revolving fund, which is funded through the new homeowners’ house payments, no-interest loans provided by supporters and fundraising

The idea for Fauquier Habitat for Humanity came from community members Dick Wingo and Dennis Osborn, who often dedicated their time to work on Habitat homes being built elsewhere. Rather than leaving the area to do their good work, they reasoned, why not bring Habitat For Humanity to their local community? They took their idea to fellow church members at Warrenton Presbyterian.

“The idea spread through the rest of us and we got it started,” recalled Bill Richardson, who was part the core group that got Fauquier Habitat off the ground.

The start-up process wasn’t easy, Richardson recalled. “There was a lot of detailed information you had to give them,” he said. “You had to demonstrate that you were serious about starting a chapter.”

As part of proving the community’s dedication to the Habitat cause, the organizers had to raise \$3,000 in small donations (nothing more than \$100) to show that Fauquier County would support a local affiliate.

The group, which often gathered in meeting space provided by Waterloo Motors owner Dan Lowery, also had to create a detailed operating plan, including how the committees would work and who would lead them. The application process took many months, Richardson recalled, but “we finally got it approved.” Lowery, another key member of the team that got the affiliate started, served as Fauquier Habitat’s first President. Richardson was the first Treasurer, and his wife Eva took on the role of Fundraising Chairwoman.

The group’s first project, which took place before Fauquier Habitat For Humanity was formed, was building a homeless shelter in Warrenton. The group bid on the project and won. That project, completed in 1988, created the original Fauquier Family Shelter. It also provided funds that allowed Fauquier Habitat, officially formed in 1991, to launch its first full home build project—a house on Warrenton’s Haiti Street for Annabelle and Charlie Gibson. It was dedicated in 1992.

One of the early tasks for Fauquier Habitat volunteers was learning how to build a house. Local builders stepped in to help. They would dedicate weekends to helping the volunteers, and some even held free seminars, recalled Bill Beals, who has chaired Fauquier Habitat’s Building Committee for a decade and was one of the builders who lent a hand.

Beals said that the early Fauquier Habitat houses were built using “building blitzes,” involving volunteers and experienced contractors. A blitz would take a house from foundation to under-roof in a day and a half, teaching volunteers a great deal in the

process. “A lot of the education occurred in those,” Beals said. “You had so many people there at once and so much going on.”

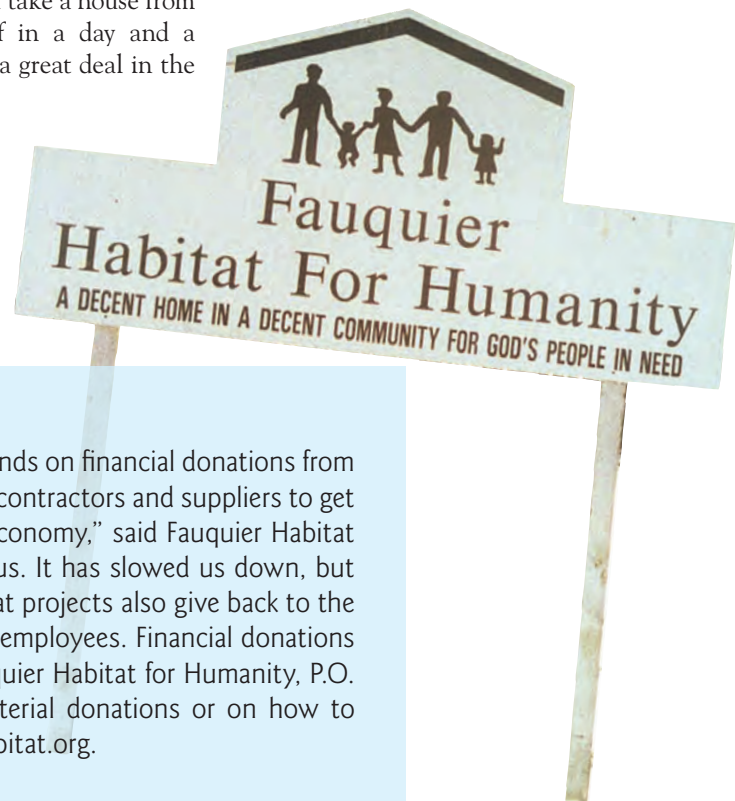
Beals, who now owns WG Beals Consulting, has collaborated with many of his fellow contractor competitors on Habitat efforts. “It’s amazing how the competition goes away at that point,” he said. “If we meet on any other terms, it gets pretty competitive. Once we had this reason for building, the competition goes away.”

Since the Gibson house put Warrenton on the Habitat For Humanity map, Fauquier Habitat has reached out to all corners of the county—and beyond. Fauquier Habitat has completed houses in Catlett, Goldvein, Marshall, Midland, and Sowego, to name a few spots. There’s also been one Fauquier Habitat house in Rappahannock County.

In each of those houses live people whose lives have forever been changed. One family sent a son off to Bridgewater College on a scholarship. Another homeowner now runs a business in Old Town Warrenton. Faye Walker’s daughter has gone on to college, while Walker works full-time and cares for her son, who was diagnosed with lupus several years ago. She said their new home on Sterling Court would mean more comfort for him than he’s ever experienced.

“Habitat had a vision, and that vision came to light,” said Walker. “The dream became a reality for so many people.

“They help us, but we have to help ourselves first,” added Walker. “You have to work hard for something that you want.”



How Can You Help?

In addition to volunteer help, Fauquier Habitat For Humanity depends on financial donations from local individuals and organizations and material donations from subcontractors and suppliers to get projects done. “Donations are down significantly because of the economy,” said Fauquier Habitat Executive Director Brenda Drenenberger. “But that hasn’t stopped us. It has slowed us down, but it hasn’t stopped us.” Besides helping local families, Fauquier Habitat projects also give back to the community by employing local builders using, in most cases, local employees. Financial donations can be made online at www.fauquierhabitat.org or via mail to Fauquier Habitat for Humanity, P.O. Box 3189, Warrenton, VA 20188. For information on making material donations or on how to become a volunteer, call (540)341-4952 or e-mail info@fauquierhabitat.org.