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# Family enjoying working toward new home

By **MARK CALDER**  
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For the past eight weeks, Troy Blair has been feeling the sweat pour down his face and the scaly lumps of blisters on his palm.

And he loves it.

For with every bead of sweat, every hardened blister and every aching muscle, he and wife Robin are one step closer to their dream of owning a home.

The Blairs and their three boys will soon be masters of the first home built locally by Habitat for Humanity, an international charity that helps low-income families realize their dream of owning a home.

The Blairs' three-bedroom bungalow is now under construction at 168 Brock Street.

As part of the deal, the family has agreed to provide 500 hours of volunteer work or "sweat equity" towards the home's construction.

The work is in lieu of a down payment on the home. The Blairs will also be required to sign a long-term, no-interest mortgage.

"It will be so nice when we're coming home to finally be coming back to our own home," said Robin of the house, to be finished in October.

The couple has been renting more than 17 years and has had more than one door shut in their

faces by loans officers at local banks.

Habitat offered them a new lease on their dream.

The couple and their sons, Matthew, 6, Kenny, 14, and Stephen, 13, have been helping with a variety of tasks on the project since the charity broke ground on the home this past spring.

Troy has helped put in stone for the foundation, spent hours in the summer heat helping frame the home and even learned to install siding.

The boys have pitched in too, mostly on clean-up duties.

The family has put in about 150 hours of work since they were selected in April from a field of 26 applicants.

A longtime chef and short-order cook at various restaurants in the Brockville area, Troy returned to school and graduated from the hotel and restaurant management program at St. Lawrence College last year.

He had two jobs after graduation, working part time at Bud's on the Bay and full time at the Buell Street Bistro.

He now works as a full-time chef at Bud's, while Robin works part time as a waitress at the New York Restaurant.

The couple's long work history was a key factor in Habitat's decision to select them, said Dave Mitchell, chairman of the local Habitat selection commit-



MARK CALDER/THE RECORDER AND TIME

**Front row, from left, are Robin Blair, son Matthew, 6, and husband Troy. Back row, from left, are the Blairs' eldest sons Stephen, 13, and Kenny, 14.**

tee. "If they didn't have full-time jobs over the years they were always working enough part-time jobs to make it a full day and they're working every day," Mitchell said.

Habitat was a solution for the Blairs, because the banks wouldn't give them a mortgage.

In fact, one loans officer told

them they had no business applying for mortgages on the home they wanted, Troy said.

"They said we're simply not homeowner material," Troy added. "We work and work and work, yet we still couldn't get ahead enough to buy one."

Ironically, his attempt to get ahead by going back to school saddled him with student debt

that provided another roadblock to qualifying, he said.

The family is now located in one half of a small duplex on Pearl Street, in a cramped three-bedroom apartment.

Habitat for Humanity is an international charity that has 963 projects in North America and more than 140 projects in 32 other countries.