

# A new

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It's the best Christmas present the family could have asked for.

It's a lot easier to express holiday cheer and goodwill towards men when family members aren't constantly in each other's faces.

Larry McDougald was all smiles last Friday as he and his family moved into their new home – the fourth Thousand Islands Habitat for Humanity house.

The one-storey, four-bedroom house at 5 Glengarry Road is approximately three times the size of their old Balmoral Place apartment, which crammed the family – McDougald, his common-law wife Laurie-Lynn Smith and their four children, Lindsey, 15, Shannon, 11, Sierra, 5, and Sarah, 1 – into 690 square feet.

The house was finished ahead of its scheduled December 31 completion date thanks to the hard work of volunteers and the family, who logged a total of 942 hours – almost twice the number of volunteer hours that a family is required to put in.

"It's just excellent," McDougald said. "We put an awful lot of hours into it, but we got so much back," he said. "There were so many people offering help, hugs and smiles on a daily basis. It was just a positive experience."

"We couldn't have done it without all the help."

Although McDougald, who works for Adecco at Procter and Gamble, put in many 10 and 12 hour days, he said there were many volunteers.

Habitat for Humanity looks to local drywallers, roofers, plumbers to donate their time as well as people to donate land.

Having a hand in building his family's home was a wonderful experience, McDougald said.

"It makes it more special. And it makes it a lot easier to do repairs in the future because I know what's underneath," he said.

The family was busy moving their possessions from their Balmoral Place apartment all day.

The girls are looking forward to having some privacy, said McDougald.

"The little ones would get into

their sisters' stuff," he said.

"This is a celebration," said Thousand Islands Habitat for Humanity founder Valerie Kines, who was present for the move-in.

"We can't come in here tomorrow," she added happily, "because this house won't be ours anymore, it'll be theirs."

The Thousand Islands Habitat for Humanity board of directors was also present, including president and board chairman Doug Cowley, vice-president Betsy Heately, chairman of the building committee Chris Hansen and secretary Bob Gollinger.

"We're elated that they're going to be home for Christmas," said Kines.

"It's really wonderful to provide a home at this time of year," said Cowley.

The community has been very supportive of the family, McDougald

said.

"We had a lot of help moving in and some neighbours from (across the street) came over to say congratulations," he said. "That was very nice."

The Brockville-based family was chosen from approximately 20 applicants for the Thousand Islands Habitat For Humanity home last Christmas.

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit, ecumenical organization that allows low-income families to own their own homes while paying a no-interest mortgage.

The local Habitat has built three homes: for Troy and Robin Blair in Brockville in 1999, Bill and Daina Webster in Gananoque in 2000, and Tracy and Tracy Stevens in Athens in 2003.

To qualify, families must be in need, living below the poverty line,

said Kines. While Habitat garners help from people and businesses in the community to complete the construction, the family is also expected to pitch in and be able to repay an interest-free mortgage.

Habitat is constantly working to dispel the myth that families are getting a free house.

"It's an interest-free mortgage," Heately said.

Every aspect of the house itself, including the windows, doors and floors, have to be new in order to qualify for new homeowner's equity.

Habitat is a unique program in the community, Cowley said.

"You get to touch families one at a time," said Cowley. "That's what makes habitat unique."

"Habitat really does make dreams come true," McDougald said.