

# New home dream for Athens couple

By ROY LEWIS

Having enough bedrooms will be a welcome change but being given the opportunity to own their home is a dream come true for an Athens couple.

"We would have never gotten the money from a bank. They would have just laughed at us," says Tracy Chant-Stevens.

But through the Habitat for Humanity program, designed to provide homes for low income families, construction of the Stevens' new home is well under way at the south edge of Athens. When the family takes possession of the residence later this year it will be the culmination of a long and difficult journey.

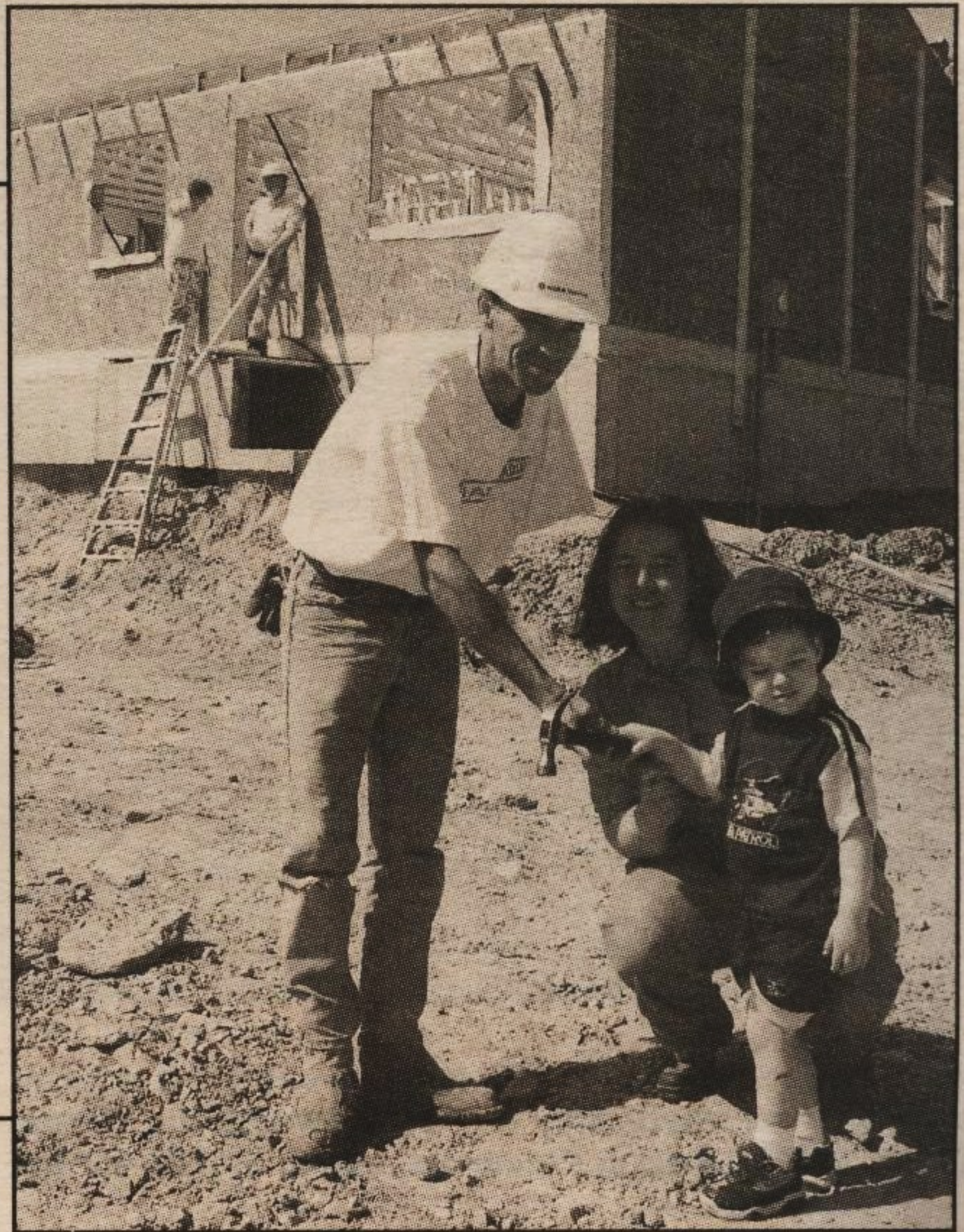
Chant-Stevens and her husband who, remarkably has the same first name of Tracy, met by accident at a mutual friend's wedding. She was a bridesmaid and he was an usher and at the wedding rehearsal they were teamed together in the bridal party. Having the same first names was an immediate ice-breaker for the couple.

Recalling their first meeting, Chant-Stevens says "we hit it off almost immediately." Their relationship later blossomed into marriage.

Life has been difficult for the couple and their two sons who are currently living in a one-bedroom, second-storey apartment on Main Street in Athens. They rent the premises from her father, Blair Chant, who has operated Blair's Barber Shop on the street level below the apartment for close to 35 years.

The living accommodations are not ideal for the Stevens family. Their three-year-old son, Gregory, sleeps in their bedroom while their other son, Jonathan, 16, must sleep on a pull-out couch in the living room. While small, the 1,400-square-foot bungalow being built for the family through Habitat for Humanity will have three bedrooms.

EMC photo by ROY LEWIS  
**Three-year-old Gregory Stevens, with a little help from his mom, Tracy Chant-Stevens, hands a hammer to his dad, Tracy Stevens, as he prepares to help other volunteers with construction of the family's new home, shown in the background, now under construction in Athens through the Habitat for Humanity program.**



"The boys will each have their own bedrooms in the new house and so will we," says Chant-Stevens.

Having an apartment on the Main Street can also be noisy particularly during the summer.

"It sometimes can get loud with music being played and kids being kids, so I will welcome the move to a quieter neighbourhood," says Chant-Stevens.

She says finding steady employment has been difficult for her husband. Stevens lost his left arm in an accident a few years ago and coupled with the disability, he also suffers from asthma. Chant-Stevens has worked sporadically as a waitress and worked for a time at a Brockville coffee shop. She is currently trying to find employment in the Athens area to assist with their new financial commitment of paying off the mortgage.

Through donations of money, material and labour, the cost of the home is kept low. However, this remaining expense must be paid by

the family through a 20-year, interest-free mortgage.

Chant-Stevens is aware she needs to upgrade her skills and is exploring the possibility of taking a diploma course in the legal secretarial field through the Internet this fall.

Meanwhile, the family is focusing on their new home being constructed on the west side of Mill Street (County Road 5). Under the Habitat for Humanity program they must complete 500 hours of volunteer work on the project. Chant-Stevens has been involved in fund-raising while her husband has been working on site with other volunteers helping to build the house.

She says they would like to eventually finish the basement of the home but for now 'it will make a great play area' for their youngest son.

While the additional bedrooms are welcome, Chant-Stevens says she will need more bedroom furniture and will be 'hitting the yard sales.'

"We were warned going

in that it would be a long and stressful journey and it has been. But it will be worth the effort in the end," says Chant-Stevens.

The family almost missed out on the program. Chant-Stevens' mother, Brenda Chant, a worker at Developmental Services of Leeds and Grenville, learned of the program through Dave Cody, a co-worker. Chant-Stevens was unable to find an application in Athens but Cody picked one up in Brockville. He passed it on to Chant who rushed it to her daughter and son-in-law. The couple submitted their application to the Habitat family selection committee just two days before the deadline.

"We just about missed out completely because we were not aware of the project," says Chant-Stevens.

*Roy Lewis is a Brockville freelance writer on assignment for the EMC.*