

Habitat celebrates start of fifth home and \$30,000 corporate donation

Home Depot contribution aids home-build project in Newboro

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NEWBORO — It was a two-storey celebration here Thursday for the Thousand Islands Habitat for Humanity chapter.

On a day when they officially kicked off construction of their fifth area home-build project, Habitat officials announced a major corporate donation to the effort.

Home Depot is contributing \$30,000, an amount Habitat board chairman Bob Gollinger said will ensure construction can begin immediately.

"It's a huge amount of fundraising that we don't have to do," said Gollinger in an interview after yesterday's ground-breaking ceremony.

Home Depot store representatives from Brockville made a wrong turn and weren't at Thursday's event to take a bow.

The Whelpdale family who will move into the house when construction is complete next spring was on hand, however.

"There are a lot of people who have worked hard to this point to get this going," Rose Whelpdale, a single mom of four now living in Westport, told the crowd of more than 50.

She and her children Dylan, 16, Stephen, 13, Toni, 11 and nine-year-

old Cody grabbed shovels to assist in the sod-turning, which came just moments after the project's building permit was nailed to a nearby tree.

While obviously grateful for Home Depot's donation, Gollinger stressed to the crowd yesterday, "The point of this occasion is the family and the building of this house."

Home Depot Brockville store manager Chrystal Duperron said in an interview later she had two carloads of people eager to attend the ground-breaking.

"We were so sad," she said.

Duperron noted that in addition to the financial donation, her staff will also volunteer time to help in the construction.

"It's amazing just to know that we can help provide a safe, decent place for them to live," she said.

Home Depot has supported Habitat home builds across Canada since 1996, giving more than \$3 million in cash and building supplies, said Duperron.

Yesterday's event was the highlight of what's been a difficult year for Thousand Islands Habitat for Humanity.

In May, a fire tore through the organization's ReStore and ultimately put the operation out of business.

Gollinger said that robbed them



MICHAEL JIGGINS/THE RECORDER AND TIMES

Members of the Whelpdale family break ground Thursday on the Habitat for Humanity home they'll move into in Newboro next year. They are Dylan, left, 16, Stephen, 13, Toni, 11, Rose and Cody, 9.

of a critical source of funds, making Home Depot's support more crucial.

They also got some good news on the fundraising front from Rideau Lakes Township Councillor David Bianco, who told the crowd the township is waiving fees for the building, entrance and septic permits.

The township also donated the lot, while the fee waivers represent a savings of about \$2,500, Bianco said later.

"I know (Whelpdale) and her family will be happy in this friendly village," Bianco said in a brief speech, adding, "All I can say now is let the build commence."

He noted the township has donated two lots to the Habitat chapter and said council is eager to see the second project begin.

Indeed, Gollinger pointed out in an interview that Habitat also has

commitments from officials in Prescott and Cardinal for housing lots.

What's holding them back from forging ahead there, he stressed, are financial and human resources.

"We have three lots and what we really need to do is fundraise so we can build," said Gollinger.

Whelpdale said she's already getting to know some of her future neighbours.

She admitted she's still getting used to her "celebrity status" since it was announced her family was chosen for the house.

Whelpdale, who is employed as a cook at Camp Iawah in Godfrey, said her kids often ask to visit the site.

"To actually see it coming together is exciting," she said.

Both she and her eldest son, Dylan, will help in the construction

but her three other kids are too young to actually work on the site.

However, she said their "sweat equity" in the project will come when it's time to paint and build the kitchen cabinets.

Habitat families must contribute 500 hours of labour and pay an interest-free mortgage.

A dozen participants in St. Lawrence College's Rideau Lakes Builds alternative education program and their program co-ordinator Mike Laking were also at Thursday's event.

Laking said his students helped clear the site as part of their 12-week program.

Gollinger said Habitat is still actively fundraising for this project as well as putting out the call for volunteers — particularly skilled tradesmen.

Anyone interested in contributing can call 342-3521.