

Single mom

By NICK GARDINER

Staff Writer

PORTLAND — A single mother of four said she is “anxious and nervous” about being the latest family chosen for a new home to be built by Thousand Islands Habitat for Humanity.

“We were all very shocked,” Rose Whelpdale told The Recorder and Times during a successful Habitat auction on Saturday at the Portland United Church.

“I’m very happy but I’m still in that just-found-out stage. ... It’s a big step, a step we look forward to, but it’s a big step.”

Whelpdale is a cook at Camp Iawah in Godfrey and has rented the same house for five years in Westport.

She said they are happy in Westport but thrilled with the opportunity to move into the fifth home to be built by the local Habitat chapter in Newboro.

For one thing, she said the new home will have more space for a family that includes teens Dylan, 16, and Stephen, 13, daughter Toni, 11, and Cody, 9.

“We need more space for the boys. The kids are getting bigger.”

Whelpdale said she is also grateful the children will continue at the same schools — Rideau Vista Elementary in Westport and Rideau District High School in Elgin — after the move east on County Road 42 when the house is ready sometime next year.

She said the new house is all about providing stability for the family.

“It’s ours. If we want to paint the walls or grow a garden, we can do it.”

Growing a garden is something planned by Whelpdale, who said she was initially hesitant to apply when Habitat advertised for families in the area.

She credited pastor Bob Popma of Olivet Baptist Church and Rideau Vista principal Sue Todd for encouraging her to apply.

“That’s what made me decide to go ahead.”

Habitat for Humanity spokesman Valerie Kines said the organization has worked hard to expand its base of support and Saturday’s auction and introduction of the Whelpdale family was a celebration of the positive response from Rideau Lakes Township.

“We’re just so excited. This is a

happy day," said Kines.

She said the township donated enough property to build two homes in Newboro while Saturday's auction – which raised \$3,466 for the project – was sponsored by the Portland and Elgin United Churches.

"We were third-party recipients."

In turn, the Whelpdales are happy recipients of Habitat's generosity. But Kines said people shouldn't underestimate the family's responsibility.

Along with putting up 500-man hours of "sweat equity" towards the building project – which began with the family assisting at the auction – they must have the ability to pay a small, no-interest mortgage, she said.

"It's not a free house."

Moreover, Habitat takes measures to help families handle the responsibilities that come with being a homeowner, she said.

"One of the things we want to do is set the family up for success."

Family support committee chairman Judy Pearson said two volunteers from Newboro are prepared to provide advice on financing a mortgage, home insurance, taxes and a range of other issues including "what to do when the tub won't drain."

"She'll be learning all the things about being a homeowner."

Building committee chairman David Regier hopes construction will begin by the end of summer so they have a closed-in house by the winter that they can finish "in bites" next year.

He said a site plan and house plan still has to be finished and a schedule established for volunteers, including many contractors who are already very busy this summer.

"I have all these balls in the air and I think they're all going to come

down at once," said Regier.

He said the local community will be counted on to step to the forefront again when requests go out for volunteer help. Retired tradesmen are prime candidates, he added.

"It is their community and you want to draw from their community," he said, noting it is a challenge regularly faced by the Thousand Islands chapter.

It isn't easy to commute nor is it reasonable to expect tradesmen who volunteered on homes in Brockville or Gananoque to sign up for evenings and weekend work in Newboro, he said.

"That's what's kind of hard. Every time you move, you're just starting over again."

The Thousand Islands chapter has already built two homes in Brockville and one in Athens and Gananoque and is considering Cardinal for a future site.