

# 250 Homes, 25 Years BUILDING DREAMS

By **MACY MOORE**



DR. MURRAY MILFORD HAS BEEN A HABITAT VOLUNTEER FOR 25 YEARS.

**T**he three houses lining the street expose only bones as workers toil and tackle more of the structure at hand. The new homes will soon belong to citizens seeking a helping hand to transform their lives in ways they never thought feasible. This advancement embodies the entire purpose of Habitat for Humanity, an organization dedicated to building homes for low-income families.

“We’re giving them a hand up, not a hand out,” says Ryan Pierce, the Director of Communications for Habitat for Humanity. “We have a partnership with the families we work with. Before they can move into the home they complete 500 sweat equity hours by working on other families’ houses or working in our ReStore.”

The families must earn 300 hours before breaking ground on their own home and 200 hours as their house is being built. The future homeowners are also required to take twelve homeownership classes dealing with the fundamentals of being a good neighbor and home upkeep.

Pierce feels the biggest impact of Habitat for Humanity is on the children who move into the homes. “Now these kids can sleep peacefully at night,” says Pierce. “They can feel comfortable having friends over and aren’t moving from place to place or changing schools from year to year. Plus, they have a quiet place to study and do homework. The stability and safety of the home plays a critically important positive role in their social, emotional and academic development.”

## THE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers, many of them retirees with intersecting interests in construction and community service, construct most of the Habitat homes. One volunteer in particular, Dr. Murray Milford, has been with Habitat for Humanity 25 years.

Milford is a class of 1955 Texas A&M University former student who studied Agronomy, or soil science. Upon graduation, he had a long road of joining the Army, receiving his master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin, going to Cornell on his post doctorate, and being asked to join the faculty to teach soil science before returning to College Station to teach at Texas A&M. Milford says his wife “didn’t marry a Texan thinking [she] was going to live in upstate New York,” and so they moved back to Aggieland in 1968.

While teaching classes for the university, Milford became involved in his church, and when he attended a church meeting discussing the start of a Habitat for Humanity affiliate for Bryan/College Station, he was hooked. He was placed on the selection committee for the first house, and though the house was built 25 years ago, Milford still remembers the couple that moved in.

As he has been with Habitat from its beginnings in 1989, Dr. Milford has worked on almost every house built by Habitat for Humanity in the region. Despite such a long tenure, Milford says a couple families stand out vividly in his mind due to their unceasing work ethic despite work-

ing full-time. “These people worked full-time jobs and were still able to get all of their hours in time,” says Milford. “They were so personable and dedicated even though they were also working hard outside of Habitat.”

Another devoted volunteer is Dr. John Martin, who was a veterinarian and professor at Louisiana State University before coming to College Station in 2001. While in Baton Rouge, Martin volunteered with the local Habitat for Humanity

## WHEN ASKED WHICH HOUSE MEANS THE MOST TO HIM MARTIN REPLIES ‘THE NEXT ONE!’

and continued his volunteer work after the move to College Station.

“I have always loved carpentry work,” says Martin. “And Habitat fits into my volunteering passion as well. I love to do it, and it’s for a really excellent cause.”

One of many meaningful occurrences Martin experienced while volunteering dealt with a woman who was supporting two children, and was likely never paid more than minimum wage. As she was working on a house one day, Martin asked, “Have you seen the slab they put down for your home? They laid out the foundation yesterday.” She replied that she had not, and that she would go see it. She didn’t return for quite some time, and so Martin went around to her lot to



find the woman sitting on her slab in tears.

“It was just so meaningful for her for everything to come together,” says Martin. “It’s one thing to see it all on paper, but it’s another to see your house at that stage.” Up until that point, she hadn’t completely accepted the fact that she was going to receive a home. He mentions that it’s not uncommon to see someone who has lived a beat down life to put up a false front up until they’re given the keys, and then the idea truly sinks in.

### THE IMPACT

In 1991, Insite Magazine featured a story of Janice Kelley, the second Habitat owner in the Bryan/College Station area. As a teenage parent with three small children, she dropped out of high school and was living in unsafe conditions before a coworker advised her to apply for Habitat for Humanity. Now, 23 years later, Janice has paid off her house and is leading a comfortable lifestyle. All three of her children have graduated high school, and her youngest graduated from Texas Christian University. Despite her rough beginnings, Janice returned and completed high school, and is graduating with a degree from Sam Houston State University in December.

“I want to work with teenage parents and help them get on the right track,” says Janice. “They need to know that just because they started a family early doesn’t mean they can’t move forward in life and be successful.”

Habitat for Humanity handed a feeling of consistency and security to Janice. Her children were no longer subjected to a dangerous neighborhood; in return they were finally allowed to play without the concern of violence.

“Being a homeowner has blessed me to become a strong independent women and this has allowed my kids to see me as a role model,” says Janice. “Living in our new home inspired me even more to give my kids a better life than I had.”

### 25 YEARS, 250 HOMES

This year, Habitat for Humanity is celebrating the 25th year building homes in the B/CS area. To commemorate the anniversary, the organization will raise the walls on the 250th home in November.

When questioned which house means the most to him, Martin replies, “The next one! The next one is the most important.” *i*



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