# Photos & Story by Alan Piñon

Maria Lagunas said she wanted a life "free of violence." A life in which she and her five children could be free to live the way they wanted.

To achieve that goal, Lagunas left an abusive relationship with her husband and made the 800-mile trip from the Chicago area to Seaford, Delaware with her children, looking for help from a friend. But once in Delaware, the search for a place to call home that was safe and comfortable for herself, Jean Paul, 13, John, 11, Gricelda, 8, Jackeline, 6, and Sergio, 3, was not easy.

The Lagunas family lived in a shelter for a time when they first arrived here in December of 2004, Lagunas said. Then they lived in a trailer park in Millsboro, but were forced to move from there when six of the owner's family members moved in with them, leaving Maria and the children just one room to live in. "He (the owner) told me it was just for me, but after one month, his family came," she said.

So it was off to Milford, where Maria said it was very difficult to find a rental she could afford. "I could rent only one room." But soon Maria was forced

# Coast Press Page

## Home at last



Single Lagurius, S. rans out the front door of his new home in Georgetown. At his last residence in Hurlock, Mil., his mother, Maria, was ahad to let him and his feur shifting outside because of the changes in the neighborhood. This home was built by volunteers through Sussex County Habitat for Hamanity.

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See LAGURAS, page 88

## Route 1 road wo to begin

By Roger Hillie Staff Writer

When it comes to ir jams on southbound i near Lewes, things are to get worse before the better.

better.
On Priday officials the state Department Transportation outlis forthcoming Boats 1 Expansion Project. Construction will con Sept. 11, said DefDOT public relations direc Darrel Cole.

The project will take over two years — year — to build cotten lance 1.5-cmile stretch from the Boute 1-index section v. Leves to the Boute 3-i informetion just soul Mildway A third lance dedicated to vehicles, fourth lane will be also bigglish, buses and w making righthand to Sidewalls for podes will also be installed, there will be marking crossovalies at Postal I.

with also be installed, there will be marking crosswalks at Postal I and the entrance to th Tunger Midway outlet center.

center.
Officials said statis
compiled for the state
Highway Safety
Improvement Prograe
revealed an excessive

See BOAD WORK

out of the single room apartment because the owner of the apartment said Maria had too many children and she had to go. "Constantly moving is too much for the kids. It means having to start again and again for everything, she said. We didn't even have furniture, we had small things and clothes, that's all," Lagunas said, interviewed with the help of a Spanish-language interpreter.

Lagunas says over and over that all she wants is a better life for her children, and for her. A large part of that, she says, means a stable home where they can be comfortable and safe.But a feeling of safety is proving difficult to find too. Unable to find an apartment near Georgetown, where Maria works everyday on a chicken farm, she relocated the family to Hurlock, Md., an hour and 20 minutes trek, one way, to work. "I had no other option."

The apartment she found in Hurlock was two stories, with room enough for the family, but they had nothing much to put in it. Other than a couple of mattresses, a television resting in the corner of the room and a few random toys and clothes strewn about, the home was empty. No table, no chairs, no couch. And outside was a neighborhood that even this

reporter was warned by locals about going in to, especially after dark. Maria wouldn't even let her kids outside to play there. "There are too many people around all the time," she says. "All the time the police come here because something happens in the neighborhood." Maria and the children won't be staying in this place for long either, but this time the move will be very welcomed. By September of 2005, she had already applied for and been accepted as the recipient of a home to be built by Sussex County Habitat for Humanity. There are three criteria one must meet in order for Habitat to build a home, said Kevin Gilmore, executive director of Sussex County Habitat for Humanity. The person must be able to pay a simple monthly mortgage, must be willing to work with Habitat on the build and future projects, and, Gilmore says, Habitat is looking to get people out of bad housing situations and into good ones."

Maria's housing need was significant. The entire family was living in one room of a two room apartment and conditions of the place were pretty bad," Gilmore said. Not only would the Lagunas home be new to the family, it would be a new project for Habitat in two significant ways. It would be the first time Sussex County Habitat for humanity built a two-story home for a family, and it would also be the first time Habitat embarked on what is called an Apostles Build." The idea of the Apostles program is to find 12 community churches that would divide the cost and labor for building the house," says Habitat Project Coordinator, Stephanie Creel. Creel found the churches through the Lewes-Rehoboth Association of Churches (LRAC), which is a voluntary association of 18 churches made up of a variety of denominations in the Lewes and Rehoboth area, said Rev. Jack Abel of Epworth United Methodist in Rehoboth and president of LRAC.LRAC absorbed the majority of the cost, donating \$63,000 toward the cost of the build. Twelve of the member churches provided all the manpower as well as \$1,000 from each church that participated. "I can't emphasize enough how important LRAC was to this project and the outpouring of caring people the churches had," Creel said.

"There were life-time bonds formed through this project. Maria will have this community of folks that worked to help her and her kids in her corner forever." Habitat chose to build the two story home for two reasons, says Creel. The lot size for the home was too small to build the usual one story,





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John leans on his mother while saying a grayer at the habitation oversors at their new home, in Georgiown, Saturday Aug. 12



#### LAGUNAS

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From page, 81

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in Hartieck. Here the
atmosphere in the home was
lasht as the late evening sun.



Jean Faul, left, and John look over DVDs as they unpack in their new room. John will be sharing this room with his little broth Sergio, Joan Faul, the oblist, has his even room.

but more importantly, Creel said, they wanted to build a larger home for the big family. Instead of the usual threebedroom, one-bath, Maria's home has four bedrooms and two bathrooms. In the end. Creel estimates that at least 200 people worked for nearly 10 months, working only on Saturdays, to build the home. Lagunas and her children moved into their new home just outside of downtown Georgetown on Aug. 16. Clothes, furniture and boxes lay strewn about the home on move-in day, making it seem a bit cluttered. But the home has a starkly different atmosphere than their previous residence.

Gone was the dim, empty and painfully over-used apartment in Hurlock. Here the atmosphere in the home was light as the late evening sun drifted in the back windows. Gricelda and Sergio sat together in the shade of the front porch reading books. Jean Paul and John sat together upstairs in a bedroom looking through DVDs as they unpacked, Jackeline in the room next door sifting through her clothes and Maria, smiling, worked putting the kitchen together. "My kids' lives will be changed a lot. They can have hope for a better life.

I think for me alone, it would have been impossible to buy a house with my salary at the chicken farm, and the big family. I never could afford it. I am grateful to Habitat for Humanity and all the people ... They helped me and my kids and they have a heart that compares to none," Lagunas said.