

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



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,



Bob Faust works on cutting wood for the upstairs framework of the home. Habitat for Humanity estimates that about 200 people helped build the house.



Maria Lagunas, above, was required to help out every Saturday in the home, from start to finish.



They close, top left, hold the wooden in a prayer before starting work on the home. Every morning of work started with a prayer.



Even in an almost empty apartment in Harlock, Md., the Lagunas children find ways to have fun. Here, Maria chases Gracie through the front room.



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John Paul leans on his mother while saying a prayer at the habitation ceremony at their new home in Georgetown, Saturday, Aug. 12.



Maria Lagunas smiles when given the "lay" to her home at a ceremony.

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Gricelda, above, and Jackeline, right, stand with Maria during the habitation ceremony of their new home.



Gricelda and Sergio settle in on the front porch of their home to read books in the early evening.

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Creel found the churches through the Lower-Bethel United Methodist Association of Churches (LBAC), which is a voluntary association of 10 churches made up of a variety of denominations in the Lower and Bethel United Methodist areas, said Rev. Jack Abad of Epworth United Methodist in Bethel and president of LBAC.

LBAC absorbed the majority of the cost, donating \$60,000 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 LBAC was to this project and the outpouring of caring people the churches had," Creel said. "There were 100-hour bonds formed through this project. Much of it was

Creel. The lot size for the home was too small to build the usual one story, but more importantly, Creel said, they wanted to build a larger home for the big family.

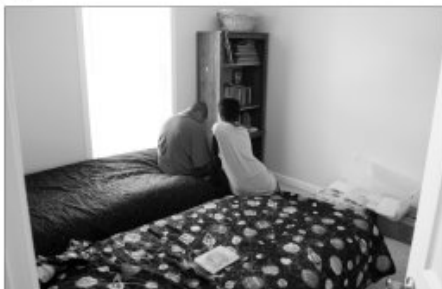
Instead of the usual three bedrooms, one bath, Maria's home has four bedrooms and two bathrooms.

In the end, Creel estimates that at least 300 people worked for nearly 10 months, working only on Saturdays, to build the house.

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



Juan Paul, left, and John Paul look over DVDs as they unpack in their new room. John will be sharing this room with his little brother Sergio. Juan Paul, the oldest, has his own room.

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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.