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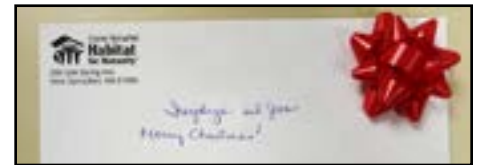
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Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity® NEWS

December
2021



Left: Soon-to-be homeowners Juan and Ireydiza (right) stand with their daughter after receiving a surprise visit from Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity on Dec. 8 to announce the good news.

GSHFH welcomes three new partner families to organization

Welcome to the Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) family. Three Western Massachusetts families have been approved for new homes and each will purchase a Habitat home in the coming two years.

The three homes will all be situated in Holyoke. Two will have three bedrooms and one-and-a-half bathrooms. The third home will have four bedrooms and two full bathrooms. The families applied through our

homeownership program, participated in an online interview, virtual home tour, and volunteered at a build site to get a better grasp of the “sweat equity” concept. Sweat equity is in place of a traditional down payment. Partner family members who are 16 and older can volunteer their labor or time at a Greater Springfield Habitat property in lieu of the monetary contribution.

“We have been accepting applications for these new Habitat

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GSHFH bids farewell to board member Bill Russo-Appel



Photo credit: Marie Ciosek

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors Clerk Bill Russo-Appel, left, speaks with Walt Tomala, former Greater Springfield Habitat board president, at Fall Festival on Nov. 5.

Thank you for your six years of service, Bill Russo-Appel. We wish you luck and prosperity in your next venture.

At the end of December, Bill, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Board of Directors clerk, will have reached the end of his second term and will step down. He has served the board since 2016 and as clerk since 2018.

"I became a member of the GSHFH board to make a difference in the lives of area residents," said Bill, a native of Holyoke who now lives in East Longmeadow. "After working on three to four house builds and attending house dedications, I have seen first-hand how Habitat has made a positive impact on people's lives and the neighborhoods where Habitat builds houses. Being on the board has definitely been very rewarding, inspiring, and heartwarming."

Bill said he first learned about GSHFH at work. Greater Springfield Habitat had put out word asking if anyone might be interested in joining the board or volunteering for the nonprofit organization. Bill said yes and began serving on the Resource

Development Committee, which concentrates its efforts on raising money for the affiliate. That position led to a spot on the board, his first time volunteering in such a capacity. The learning curve was steep as he soon realized Greater Springfield Habitat doesn't just do construction.

"It's also a mortgage company, social service organization, and a fundraising engine, all combining to ensure Habitat provides stable, sustainable, and affordable housing," Bill said.

Bill soon moved up the ranks to clerk, where he writes the minutes for each meeting, including retreats, updates the board roster with the Massachusetts Secretary of State's office, and sometimes signs contracts and grants.

Since Bill joined GSHFH, he said he's seen the organization weather several challenges, including staff turnover and COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Despite it all, he said Greater Springfield Habitat has persevered.

"To me, success means improving in good times and remaining viable in bad times. Through the pandemic, GSHFH



Bill (front) participates on a build site.

remained open and continued to build houses with the mission as its guide," Bill said. "It was quite impressive to witness and I'm proud to have been a part of the organization in this trying time."

The affiliate is proud of him and the service he provided. He will be missed.

"Working with Bill over the past five years has been a pleasure. He was committed to his role as a board member and dedicated to our mission," said Aimee Giroux, GSHFH executive director. "His enthusiasm and dedication will be greatly missed as a member of the board. It's my hope that he will not go too far and we'll see him out volunteering on the job sites in the future."

GSHFH Board of Directors President Anne Eisenman shared Aimee's sentiment.

"Bill has been an awesome board member who has shared insightful advice and has been willing to assist with any task that needs attention," Anne said. "I will miss having him on our board."

Liz Persch, GSHFH board member who will replace him as clerk, agreed.

"Bill has always been a huge asset for GSHFH; from promoting the organization to friends and family, to having great ideas and contributions on the board," Liz said. "We will miss you Bill, but wish you nothing but the best."

SPOTLIGHT ON

Bill Russo-Appel
Board member
of East Longmeadow, MA

If you could travel through time and go back to any era/time period, where would you go and why?

I would go back to the late 1940s, early 1950s so I could see my late parents meet each other and attend their wedding.

Is a hotdog a sandwich?

No. A hotdog is a hotdog, not a sandwich.

What are your hobbies?

I enjoy running, playing golf, taking art classes, and playing frisbee with my dog.

What song best sums you up? "Let it Be" by the Beatles

Would you rather have unlimited sushi for life or unlimited tacos for life?

Definitely tacos because I don't like sushi.

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity

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Did you know?

The Rockefeller Christmas tree benefits Habitat for Humanity



Photo credit: AP Images

The 2021 Rockefeller Center Christmas tree is a 79-foot-tall Norway Spruce that is 46 feet wide and weighs 12 tons. The tree hails from Elkton, Maryland, a first in the tradition's history. Typically, the tree comes from states farther north or Canada. The tree is lit by 50,000 multi-colored LED lights and topped with a 900-pound Swarovski star, which has 3-million crystals. When the tree is taken down in early January 2022, it will be milled into lumber and used to help a Habitat partner family build their home. Lumber from the famous tree has been donated to Habitat every year since 2007.

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homes since March of 2021,” said Deborah O’Mara, GSHFH Family Services manager. “It’s exciting to know we’ve found three eligible and financially qualified families to become our next Habitat homeowners.”

Family #1

One family, comprised of a single mother and her four children will purchase the soon-to-be-built four-bedroom home. The family, which has three girls and a boy, currently resides in an apartment with significant issues, including poor insulation, sewage backups, mold in the basement, a leaky roof, and is in an unsafe neighborhood. The apartment is just one of many the family has lived in through the years. As survivors of domestic abuse, the mother wants to show her children it is possible to break the cycle and give back to the community that helped them escape their situation.

With the support of a local social service agency, the mother said she received counseling, training, and employment.

“I have a beautiful family, an awesome job, and I am now working toward buying my first home. I have hopes, dreams to do better, and be better than my upbringing,” she said. “It’s not about where you come from, it’s about where you’re going. Good attitudes produce better outcomes.”

Family #2

A single mother and her three teenage boys will move into a three-bedroom home currently under construction.

After becoming a young mom, she said she struggled to earn better than minimum wage. With her mother’s help, she went back to school and became a certified medical assistant working at a local doctor’s office. In doing so she achieved financial stability and overcame many of the obstacles facing young mothers.

“It’s not about where you come from, it’s about where you’re going. Good attitudes produce better outcomes.”
- New partner family

But, she wanted more for children.

Since divorcing her abusive husband, she’s strived for a safe and decent affordable home. Within her current apartment, her two youngest sons share a bedroom and bed. Looking for

a sense of privacy and space, the youngest boy sleeps on the couch. Additionally, the neighborhood they live in is terribly unsafe. It has several vacant buildings, homeless people, drugs, and vehicles are frequently vandalized.

“I see so much better for my children and I want to be able to provide them a forever home – a place where we will feel safe, stable, happy, and accomplished,” she said. “We want a place to create beautiful memories for many years to come.”

Family #3

Ireydiza and her husband Juan will purchase the other three-bedroom home, which is in the process of being built. The couple has two young children. Just four years ago, the family was happy, healthy, and dreaming of buying their first home. Then tragedy struck. A workplace injury disabled Juan, the breadwinner. Following several surgeries and two strokes, their dreams were put on hold. Juan was unable to return to work. Ireydiza left school to be the sole breadwinner, create time to care for her young children and recuperating husband.

“He has a permanent handicap placard at the age of 33. He lives with chronic pain every day of his

life,” Ireydiza said. “The stroke left him with chronic migraines, which he now gets Botox for every 12 weeks to help alleviate the pain. He is unable to walk or stand for a long period of time, and he has a weakness on his right side.”

Despite the pain or struggle, Juan gives back where he can. Whether it’s playing with his children, sharing his story on social media to bring awareness to strokes and the symptoms, or supplying food to the homeless, Juan is determined to make the best of his situation.

The family is eager to move forward and out of the apartment, which in winter is cold in the living room and master bedroom. Plus, Juan and Ireydiza’s bedroom is on the second floor, which Juan has trouble reaching due to the stairs. Additionally, the neighborhood is dangerous with gunfire. Drug activity is common.

“We’ve been trying to leave for a while. This neighborhood has a bad reputation,” said Juan. “We want something different for our kids. We want them to be able to give them something where they come home and say, ‘This is our home’.”

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[Decorative graphic with a white Christmas tree and snowflakes on a dark red background]