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**Introducing our
newest feature:**



Habitat in your neighborhood

See Page 3



Greater Springfield
**Habitat
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NEWS

**March
2024**



Photo by Marie Ciosek | Photosynthesis

Soon-to-be homeowner Antonia holds up ceremonial keys to her new Holyoke home at the dedication held on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14. She closed on the house the following day.

Congratulations, Antonia! **GSHFH celebrates dedication**

On a blustery and cold Valentine's Day morning in Holyoke, more than 30 guests attended Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's (GSHFH) dedication on Chestnut Street. The event celebrated the completion of construction of a new home and the affiliate's first insulated concrete form (ICF) project; and soon-to-be homeowner Antonia and her family.

A winner of the Greater Springfield Hearts and Homes challenge was also selected and announced.

The dedication attracted Antonia's friends and family, community members, including Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia, Greater Springfield Habitat board members, volunteers, and donors. The completion of the Chestnut Street home marked GSHFH's

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- prizes
- goody bags
- snacks
- wrap party at Two Weeks Notice brewery

Saturday, March 23 | 10am-3pm
(rain date Sunday, March 24)

In honor of March's Women's History Month and Habitat for Humanity's Women Build event, join us!



268 Cold Spring Ave, West Springfield

Ladies, leave the "honey to-do list" for another day. Let's get together and celebrate our strengths, camaraderie, and build! Grab your friends and join us. Learn DIY skills and build outdoor furniture and/or accessories for a Habitat auction (at a later date). Just pick an item to construct from the list on the website, register, and come dressed in closed-toed shoes and weather-appropriate clothes that can get dirty.

Cost: \$250 per team (Teams = 5-8 people max. Must be at least 16 to participate.) Cost includes supplies and equipment.

To register, visit:
habitatspringfield.org/spring-into-action



Meet our families: the faces behind the Habitat homeownership mission

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) recently celebrated its newest homeowner. Single mother Antonia Santos purchased a 1,500-square-foot colonial home in Holyoke for herself and her four youngest children. Like her predecessors and someday successors, Antonia came from a challenging background in which homeownership would not be attainable through traditional means.

Greater Springfield Habitat believes its homeownership mission is a crucial foundation for any family. By moving out of substandard housing and into a Habitat home, homeowners and their families become more likely to improve their health, attain a better education, and increase their safety and personal wealth.

"I think we all gain inspiration from our partner families to continue helping others become homeowners," said Olga Callirgos, GSHFH Homeowner Programs coordinator. "It isn't easy to overcome language barriers, health issues, domestic violence, or any other bumps in the path of life, but yet it has made our partner families more driven and dedicated to a fresh start."

Antonia and her children are survivors of domestic violence. After leaving an abusive husband,



Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Executive Director Aimee Giroux (left) hands Antonia Santos the keys to her new home during the closing. McKenzie Russell-Masterson, GSHFH board member and attorney at Dalton & Finegold, looks on.

Antonia sought help from nonprofits to get a fresh start. She found counseling, training, and employment. She learned to live by a budget, save regularly, give back to the community, and build a support system through her work and church families.

"It has been a hard road, but I made it. No, we made it, my family and me," said Antonia at the Valentine's Day dedication, a ceremony celebrating the completion of the new home's construction. She closed on the house the next day. "God is good. He has blessed me tremendously,

especially with my family and the opportunity to partner with Habitat for Humanity to help make my dreams come true."

In January 2023, Greater Springfield Habitat sold a home, which neighbors Antonia's residence, to a family of four. Lifelong renters Juan Gonzalez and Ireydiza Perez purchased the home to give their two young children better lives.

Several years before they partnered with GSHFH, Juan and Ireydiza dreamed of purchasing

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their first home through traditional means. 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 become the sole breadwinner, and create time to care for their children and her recuperating husband.

“I know we all experience unexpected hardships in our life and these times are when our trust in God is tested,” Juan said. “After my stroke and losing my career, my family and I got tested. I didn’t think getting a house for them would be possible. Thanks to Habitat for Humanity, y’all are making our dream come true.

... Not only do you build houses and sell them at affordable prices, but you also save lives through this program. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for giving us the opportunity to be homeowners.”

In September 2023, Greater Springfield Habitat accepted the newest family into the homeowner program – Driss and Majda Errahali with their four children. The family emigrated from Morocco in 2018 in search of better opportunities. They lived



Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity’s newest partner family, Majda (left) and Driss Errahali with their children, celebrates the surprise announcement at the West Springfield administrative office.

in a house in West Springfield until a car crashed into the home causing structural damage. It was condemned and the family was moved to a tiny two-bedroom apartment in the same town. The girls who are 8- and 11-years old share one bedroom, while Driss, Majda, and the two youngest boys share the other bedroom.

“We applied through the homeownership program to get a

home so that our children would have a better life,” said Driss, the patriarch who works as a truck driver, while his wife Majda cares for the children. “My dream is for my children to be good people and useful to society, and do good deeds for the environment, and achieve their dreams.”

Construction on Driss and Majda’s home is scheduled to begin this spring.

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seventh build in Holyoke. The new house is also the most energy-efficient project as it utilized hollow foam blocks that were stacked into the shape of exterior walls of a building, reinforced with steel rebar, and filled with concrete, instead of using traditional wood framing. ICF combines one of the finest insulating materials – expanded polystyrene (EPS) with one of the strongest structural building materials – steel reinforced concrete. The result is a wall system of unmatched comfort, energy efficiency, and noise reduction.

“This was not a project we could have done alone. We did this in partnership with the Community Development Office and the Holyoke Housing Authority,” said Aimee Giroux, GSHFH executive director. “This house was a new construction method for us. The National Ready Mixed Concrete Association came to us and asked us to do work with them to build this house. On many, many levels this was a very interesting project for us to take on and we’re really proud to have it be completed because it was a learning curve.”

Since construction began in September 2022, more than 25 corporations and groups volunteered on the project and put roughly 4,300 hours in on the build site. They include MassMutual, Western New England University Society of Women Engineers, Holyoke High School Dean Technical Campus, Springfield’s Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy; and Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley law firm.

“For folks that know the city of Holyoke, a lot of you do work here, know we are city of compassion. My family benefitted from Holyoke’s compassion,”



Photo by Marie Ciosek | Photosynthesis

Soon-to-be homeowner Antonia (second from left) and her four youngest children who will live in the Holyoke home.



Soon-to-be homeowner Antonia’s daughters Jaelee (left) and Brianna read cards made for them by Agawam’s Roberta G. Doering Middle School Kindness Club students.

the mayor said. “Actually, this whole neighborhood was built on compassion ... I’m very proud to be in a community that cares for people and I’m even more proud to partner with the organizations that do the work in the city and that are looking out for our most vulnerable.

“With that being said, congratulations,” said Mayor Garcia. “I hope this home brings

new hope, new opportunities, and new memories for you and your family. Just know the City of Holyoke is here to support you and is behind you between now and your future endeavors.”

Single mother Antonia and her four youngest children will move into the four-bedroom,

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Focus on your Future

Credit & Money Management Workshop

Date: Wednesday, March 13

Time: 6-7pm

Location: Virtual

Cost: FREE

Get ready to learn the basics of making a budget, how to read a credit report, and about what can be done to correct errors that may negatively affect your credit rating. Led by an Operation HOPE Financial Wellbeing coach, the workshop will also cover your rights as a consumer, and how to make the most of them.

Register today: bit.ly/42Wa2aE

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two-bathroom Greater Springfield Habitat home. As survivors of domestic abuse, Antonia said she wants to show her children it's possible to break the cycle of abuse and give back to the community that helped them escape their situation.

“First, I want to say thank you to God, my family, my church, and all those who supported me. By God’s grace, I was placed in situations

where I had no choice but to depend on others to get back on my feet after losing everything due to domestic violence,” said Antonia. “It has been a hard road, but I made it. No, we made it, my family and me. God is good! He has blessed me tremendously, especially with my family, and

the opportunity to partner with Habitat for Humanity to help make my dreams come true.”

The event also included gift presentations by Springfield’s PSRB law firm, which donated a lawn mower; Holyoke Housing

Authority, which presented a laundry basket filled with cleaning and kitchen supplies; and welcome home gift baskets for Antonia and her

children from Agawam’s Roberta G. Doering Middle School Kindness Club students.

Pastor Roman Varakuta of Springfield’s Sovereign Grace Church offered a blessing to Antonia and her new home. Olga Callirgos, GSHFH Homeowner Programs coordinator, presented

Antonia with a Bible and cross, before Antonia invited the guests into her home. Inside, visitors were allowed to tour the home and snack on desserts, as well as hot food catered and donated by Crave Holyoke.

Hearts and Homes challenge – and the winner is ...

As the event drew to a close, Aimee asked Antonia to randomly select a piece of paper with a name on it from the can she held. The name would be the winner of Greater Springfield Habitat’s “Hearts and Homes” challenge, an eight-week valentines-themed fundraiser. Every \$20 donation made to Greater Springfield Habitat by end of day Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2024, was entered for a chance to win a Spa Renewal Day gift card for two people at the exclusive Canyon Ranch in Lenox. The gift card is valued at \$700. Participants didn’t have to be present to win.

Antonia randomly selected Helen Wright of Springfield.

To learn more about GSHFH, visit habitatspringfield.org



Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity

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When you donate your old car, you’re not just parting ways with a vehicle, you’re funding programs like financial education, which is part of our Habitat homeowners’ buying process. To learn more, visit habitatspringfield.org/cars-for-homes