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Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity

**Save the date:  
Monday, July 18  
Double dedication event in Holyoke.**

Details on Page 4.

Greater Springfield  
**Habitat for Humanity®**

**NEWS** July 2022

**GSHFH bids farewell**  
Beloved staff member retires



Photo credit: Marie Ciosek

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity Family Services Manager Deborah O'Mara (right in green) speaks to the Emery family (left) at the May 23 dedication ceremony.

**D**eborah O'Mara embodies the Habitat for Humanity mission and for the past three years, she's graced Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) as the Family Services manager. At the end of this month, she'll retire having served the organization well. She'll be missed. Terribly.

Debbie, as she's known in the administrative office, said in her tenure she hoped to provide the best possible service she could

to those in need and improve the lives of families wherever possible. She and others said she achieved just that.

"I have tried very hard every day to deliver on that goal," Debbie said. "I have been dedicated to doing my best for Habitat since 2017 and I believe I have improved the lives of families in Hampden County."

Debbie said she learned about Habitat for Humanity through

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# Welcome, Christina.

## Architecture intern joins GSHFH team



Christina Herp, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity intern, works remotely on home plans at her computer.

Christina Herp has successfully intertwined a love for architecture and art with a passion for community service. She recently joined the Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) team as an intern working remotely to develop future Habitat house plans.

The Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston graduate, who lives in Lexington, said she has two houses in the works right now and hopes to have a third by the end of her summer internship. She would also like work on a build site.

“I have enjoyed my intern experience with Habitat so far. It is exciting to generate designs that will hopefully help a family who needs it,” Christina said. “I hope to visit and work on a site before the end of my internship. Drafting is my strongest skill, but I love to put things together.”

Christina said she began college

with an interest in literature. On a whim, she took an introductory architectural drafting course and loved it. She changed her major to architectural design and graduated in 2020 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Christina attended Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute from 2020 to 2022, and earned a certificate in Computer Aided Design. In addition to her Habitat internship, Christina also works part-time as an accountant for a private air charter company.

Christina said she learned about GSHFH through a friend and architecture classmate who wanted to apply, but would be living elsewhere at the time of the internship. Christina applied noting the process was straightforward and relaxed.

“The executive director of the affiliate was welcoming and clear with her expectations of me,” Christina said. “I have been given full autonomy over the projects I’m

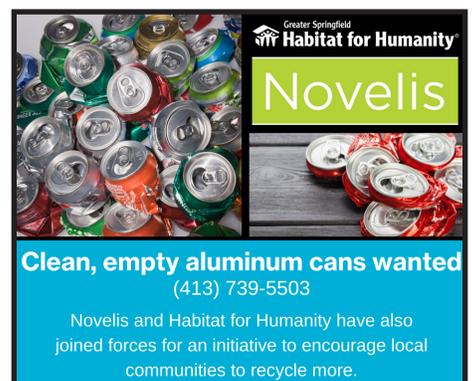
working on so far. It is exciting to be given the opportunity to develop a full set of house plans on my own.”

The Massachusetts Clean Energy Internship program provided Greater Springfield Habitat with the opportunity to hire an intern with the skills Christina has to bring Habitat’s wish list of ideas, needs, and wants to fruition, said GSHFH Executive Director Aimee Giroux.

“We needed to update our home plans to better serve the needs of families that are applying for our services. We have seen a need to accommodate multiple generations within one home,” Aimee said.

“We also wanted to include more energy-efficient and green building products into our plans, and create homes that will meet the needs of families no matter what stage of life they’re in.”

Christina said the assignment does have its challenges, such as the size restriction and has tested her to be creative and find new ways to utilize space, but she’s up to the task.



## SPOTLIGHT ON

**Christina Herp**  
GSHFH intern  
of Lexington, MA



**What was the last movie you saw in the theater? What did you think of it?** I saw *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. I enjoyed it; my boyfriend is a big Marvel fan so we like to go see all of their movies together.

**What's your favorite zoo animal?** I haven't been to the zoo in a long time, but I went to the Blue Hill Trailside Museum recently and saw a river otter in captivity that was very curious and cute.

**Are you a fan of fireworks?** I am not a fan of noise or air pollution, but I do have many fond memories of watching fireworks with my family and friends.

**What's on your bucket list?** I want to learn to play the guitar and the drums. I love music, and I would love to be able to play my favorite tunes.

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church while living in Mahopac, New York, a suburb 47 miles north of New York City. Although she wanted to get involved, she knew it wasn't the right time as she had two young children at home. She pledged to herself she would get involved when they were older. In 2017, while living in Mansfield, Massachusetts, she began volunteering as the Family and Services manager at Old Colony Habitat for Humanity in Attleboro. A year later, she saw the GSHFH website and a job ad for a Homeowner Services administrator. Debbie discussed the role and a possible move to Western Massachusetts with her husband Jim and together, they decided she should give it a shot. She began her new job in January 2019 and in June of that year, Debbie and Jim relocated full-time to Ware.

Although once known as the Homeowner Services administrator, Debbie's job title soon changed to Family Services manager. In that position, Debbie said her responsibilities have included chairing the Family Services Committee, performing outreach to find new partner families, mortgage origination work to qualify applicant families for homeownership and home repair assistance, and family selection recommendations to the board of directors and executive director. She also works with lenders to prepare for home closings, helps solve financial, mortgage, escrow, home maintenance, utility, and legal problems for more than 100 current partner families. Lastly, Debbie attends local events to spread the word about GSHFH's programs.

"Simply put, Debbie is a goddess. There's nothing she can't do and she performs her role with such grace and compassion. Greater



Photo credit: Marie Ciosek

Top: Deborah O'Mara, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Family Services manager, bumps elbows with Habitat homeowner Natasha's youngest son.

Above: Deborah O'Mara, GSHFH Family Services manager, paints a wall with primer at the Holyoke build site.

Springfield Habitat is very lucky to have had her on the team," said Brandice J. O'Brien, GSHFH Marketing and Communications manager. "It's an understatement to say she'll be missed. I'll be devastated."

Sheri L. Green, GSHFH Construction manager, agreed.

"I'm going to miss Deb's smile, her laugh, and most of all her words

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of encouragement,” Sheri said. “Every day you knew that she spoke from her heart; that is who she is. I’m ever so grateful to have her as a friend. The last two-and-a-half years have been a wonderful journey.”

Anne Eisenman, GSHFH Board of Directors president, echoed the staff’s sentiments.

“I have enjoyed working with Debbie over the past three years and will miss her upbeat presence in the office and at GSHFH events,” Anne said. “Debbie adapted processes so that Family Services effectively interacted with and supported our partner families during the pandemic. Thank you for all of your hard work and best wishes for a happy retirement, Debbie!”

In her time, Debbie said the affiliate faced several challenges, including a lack of resources, board of directors and staff turnover, and the COVID-19 pandemic with its restrictions. Despite the challenges, Greater Springfield Habitat rose above the stresses and managed several impressive feats. Among them,

GSHFH now has a full staff and every manager has been on the team for at least a year; multiple homes are simultaneously under construction; and more people are aware of Habitat’s presence in Hampden County.

“Potential partner families know we are here and they are calling us in greater numbers, more than I remember back in early 2019,” Debbie said. “Our office rarely has a crisis to manage because our well-oiled machine is working so well.”

Debbie said she is confident she is leaving the affiliate in good hands and believes she has achieved success in her role.

“We are helping to change the world one family at a time and we are always trying to improve on what we do and how we do it in order to help more families,” Debbie said. “We go beyond our scope and help solve complex homeowner problems. We are educators as well as problem solvers.”

Her husband Jim agrees.

“Working for Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity has been a highly fulfilling time for Debbie. She has had an opportunity to

help many deserving families into secure and quality housing and at the same time, improve their financial future,” Jim said. “It was a mission that came from her heart and she derived great satisfaction from the organization’s successes.”

In retirement, Debbie said she will remain active in the Greater Springfield Habitat community by donating to the cause and volunteering on build sites, but she’ll also take time for herself and explore other interests. She’d like to volunteer with rescued horses, hike with her husband, learn to bake bread and decorate cakes, spend more time with her siblings, and help care for her elderly parents.

Good luck, Debbie. Thank you for all you’ve done for Habitat!

**Advocate on behalf of Greater Springfield Habitat. To learn more, go to [habitatspringfield.org/advocacy](https://habitatspringfield.org/advocacy)**



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## Dedication Ceremony



**113 and 117 Jackson St Holyoke, MA**  
10am, Monday July 18, 2022

Greater Springfield **Habitat for Humanity**

