



From the Foundation

A place to call their own



Chantal (far left) and her family celebrate her selection for Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's Homeownership Program.

When Chantal and her three young children immigrated to Western Massachusetts in 2012, she couldn't know everything the years ahead would bring. But she knew what she wanted for them: a better life and more opportunities. Fourteen years later, after navigating the

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The Stompin' Boots crew teaches fair goers a line dance at the inaugural Habitat Fun Fest in October 2025.

Good fun, stronger communities

An afternoon of music, games, and community connections can help build something that lasts long after the festivities end: greater support for safe, affordable homes.

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's (GSHFH) second annual Habitat Family Fun Fest returns Saturday, Oct. 17, from noon to 4 p.m. at Vanished Valley Brewing Co., 782 Center St., Ludlow. With free admission and free activities for kids,

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Habitat Family Fun Fest

SATURDAY, OCT. 17
12 – 4 P.M.
FREE ADMISSION

VANISHED VALLEY BREWING CO.

782 Center St, Ludlow, MA

Join us for a free, family-friendly event filled with music, local vendors, community partners, raffles, and fun for all ages!

LIVE MUSIC
DJ, Stompin' Boots, Etienne Perley (pan pipes), and more!

LOCAL VENDORS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

RAFFLES

FREE ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

ADULT BEVERAGES

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity

Fun for the whole family. A stronger tomorrow.

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the event invites neighbors to gather, discover local businesses and organizations, and support Habitat's work throughout Hampden County.

Last year's inaugural Fun Fest welcomed roughly 150 people and raised approximately \$16,000 to support GSHFH's mission. Guests enjoyed local vendors, community partners, games, music, and live performances while learning about Habitat's programs and volunteer opportunities.

This year's celebration will feature raffles, vendors, community partners, a DJ, Stompin' Boots, and Peruvian performer Etienne Perley, who will share the sounds of the pan pipes.

"Habitat Family Fun Fest is really about bringing people together," said Aimee Giroux, executive director of Greater Springfield Habitat.

Those connections are essential to Habitat's work. Events like Fun Fest introduce people to the organization, bring neighbors and businesses together around a shared purpose, and raise funds that help local families build and purchase homes or make needed repairs to homes they already own. A conversation at a community table can also spark a new volunteer commitment, a business partnership, or a connection to helpful resources.

"Fun Fest is a welcoming place to meet community organizations, discover local resources, and learn about Habitat's Homeownership and



Top: Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) volunteers Anne and Tom Eisenman sell raffle tickets and Habitat-branded merchandise at the first Habitat Family Fun Fest in October 2025.

Bottom: Etienne Perley, performs traditional Andean music using pan pipes at GSHFH's first Habitat Fun Fest in October 2025.

Home Preservation programs," said Olga Callirgos, GSHFH Homeowner Services manager. "Whether you're interested in housing opportunities, volunteering, or supporting our work, we'd love to help you find a way to connect."

The celebration also carries forward the message of World Habitat Day, observed Oct. 5. This year's theme, "Adequate Housing for All," highlights the need for housing and the partnerships that help make it possible. Here in Hampden County, that work depends on people coming together and investing in their community.

Bring the family, invite a friend, and spend an afternoon connecting with the people and organizations helping our neighborhoods thrive.



For event information and updates, visit habitatspringfield.org/fun-fest. To explore Habitat's programs and ways to help, visit habitatspringfield.org.

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challenges of starting over in a new country, the family is preparing for another beginning — a home Chantal will help build and purchase through Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH).

Chantal received the news on a warm, sunny Friday afternoon in late June. She and her children stepped outside to find Habitat staff and board members waiting with a sign, smiles, and congratulations.

“I did not expect it at all,” she said. “I was very surprised and happy when Habitat came and told us. Being chosen by Habitat for Humanity means so much to us because it allows our family to finally have the stability we have been searching for.”

When they arrived in the United States in 2012, Chantal’s children were 3, 7, and 10. Before that, the family had lived as refugees in Rwanda after Chantal was forced to leave her native Democratic Republic of Congo because of war and conflict. In Western Massachusetts, she faced the challenges of adjusting to a new way of life while working to provide a stable home for her children.

“We have had to move three different times. One apartment was affected by a fire. Another became too small for our family, and at another home, the landlord decided to sell the property. We had to move again,” Chantal said. “Each move meant packing our belongings, finding another place to live, and starting over again.”

Chantal, who is a housekeeper at a nursing home, said she learned about Greater Springfield Habitat online and through people who have been through the program.

“I applied because I want a safe, stable, and affordable home for my family,” she said. “I want my children to have a place they can call ‘home.’”

Now, Chantal has begun the Habitat



Homebuyer Academy as part of her sweat equity requirements, taking the first steps toward building and purchasing her family’s home.

“Chantal has worked hard to create opportunities for her children through every challenge and every move,” said Olga Callirgos, GSHFH Homeowner Services manager. “As she works toward purchasing her home, she’s building on that commitment. We’re excited to walk alongside her as her family prepares for a future with a place to call their own.”

A home where dreams grow



The family home in the North End of Springfield.

In Driss and Majda’s Springfield yard, fruits and flowers are growing — and inside, so are their children’s dreams.

Sixteen months after purchasing their home through Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) in June 2025, the couple and their four children are still celebrating their achievements. Their three oldest children have settled into a new school district, their daughters are imagining their futures, and their boys run through the house knowing it’s theirs.

“We are so happy with our home. We are happy with everything,” said Majda. “We have good neighbors and we love the area. It’s so good.”

Driss, Majda, and their four children who range in age from 3.5 to 14 years old, immigrated to Western Massachusetts from Morocco in November 2018. Driss said they came via a lottery diversity program in hopes of discovering a new country and gaining more opportunities.



From left: Aya, Oumayma, Driss, Ilyass, Mohamed, and Majda sit in their Springfield home, which they purchased from Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity in June 2025.

The family had lived 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 now 11- and 14-years old, shared one bedroom, while Driss, Majda, and the two youngest boys share the other bedroom.

“They were crammed tighter than sardines,” said Olga Callirgos, GSHFH Homeowner Services manager.

Driss said because the rent was too expensive and the apartment was too small, they applied to the Greater Springfield Habitat program after learning about it from a friend.

“We applied through your program to get a home so that our children would have a better

life,” said Driss. “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.”

Now the family utilizes all the space, growing apples, figs, potatoes, tomatoes, squash, and several flowers in their yard. Inside, they’ve filled their rooms with furniture and family life, giving their four children space to move, grown, and imagine.

Fourteen-year-old Aya shares her aspirations of one day owning a business and traveling the world. Oumayma, 11, wants to become a scientist or engineer, travel, and maybe race motorcycles.

Whatever paths they choose, the girls have already seen what it means to work toward a dream. Just look at what their parents accomplished.