



Women Build KICKOFF
 Wednesday, March 12
 6pm
 White Lion Brewing
 Community Boom Rooms
 1500 Main St, Springfield



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Sunday, March 16
 12-3pm
 Fort Hill Brewery, Easthampton
 \$25/each



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Greater Springfield
Habitat for Humanity®

NEWS

March 2025



Pedro (left) and his wife Damaris smile for the camera after learning they were selected to purchase a soon-to-be constructed modest home in Holyoke. The project is a unique collaboration between Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity, Holyoke Housing Authority, and the University of Massachusetts DesignBuild program.

A unique collaboration makes dream come true for local couple

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH), Holyoke Housing Authority (HHA), and the University of Massachusetts DesignBuild program have partnered to make a local couple's dream of affordable homeownership come true.

In a unique collaboration, HHA has donated a plot of land

on Chestnut Street. Greater Springfield Habitat will prepare the site and build the foundation. UMass DesignBuild professors and students will create and construct a modular home, and oversee delivery to the Holyoke site. GSHFH will then finish the inside work and sell

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Did you know?

- More than 70% of Habitat homeowners are women
- No experience necessary to volunteer on a build site
- All tools and materials are supplied on a build site
- All are welcome, even men
- Expert instruction is provided



Women Build provides an opportunity for women to take the proactive step in helping limited-income women and their families build stability through affordable homeownership.



You will make a difference!



Every dollar raised supports local projects and affordable housing in our community.

Learn more
support@habitatspringfield.org
 (413) 739-5503

habitatspringfield.org/women-build

Habitat in your neighborhood

Gender doesn't define a woman's role in construction

The creation of "Rosie the Riveter" in the 1940s inspired women to leave their traditional domestic roles and join the male-dominated workforce in support of World War II. Today, "Rosie" reaches beyond the defense department and continues to inspire strength, sisterhood, and feminism. The number of women in male-dominated career fields continues to rise.

At Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH), gender plays no role in what women can and cannot do. Just ask Violeta Melendez, a member of the construction crew.

"I would definitely recommend other women venture into construction because, for me, it's a form of art that just anyone, not only men, can do," she said. "Plus, since we are building homes, I find it to be a great achievement when you can see the final product, look back and say, 'I did that' or 'I helped build that'."

Violeta came to Greater Springfield Habitat in January 2022 through a cooperative program with Springfield's Putnam Vocational Technical Academy. During the second



Violeta Melendez, a member of Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's construction crew, tapes a window cutout to prevent water from seeping underneath the sheathing.

semester of her senior year, she rotated between a week at a build site and a week at school. Upon graduation, she accepted a position with GSHFH and works full time.

Violeta said she really enjoys

construction because she can work with her hands and is not sitting at a desk job. Plus, at Habitat, she meets new people and is learning new things every day. But there are some

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challenges, including her height and Massachusetts' weather.

"Some of the challenges of working in construction is the weather. The cold, in particular, is hard for me since I was born and raised in Puerto Rico," Violeta said. "Also, I'm short. I can lift most things, but there's other things where I just need help from my peers."

Amy Calandrella, a past Habitat volunteer, has made her career in construction. Following a four-year apprenticeship program through the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 98, she is licensed and experienced in various pieces of heavy equipment, including a skid steer, excavator, fork lift, and paving apparatus. These days, she's a full-time instructor for her union's apprenticeship and continuing education programs.

She said she chose the trades because she was looking for a job that paid a living wage and offered skills she could build upon. Amy had previous experience with farm equipment.

"In my nine years in the field, I worked on college campuses, on rural road excavation projects, on highway and suburban milling and paving tasks, on parking garages and train tunnel repair, on rail upgrades, and river cleanup. Every job was a new



Amy Calandrella, a past Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) volunteer, operates an excavator at a previous build site for a new GSHFH home.

adventure and new opportunity to learn a different application of my trade," Amy said.

Like Rosie, Amy said she believes women belong in the trades.

"Remember, you are capable and have the ability to learn. There is nothing they can't teach you," she said. "Success in construction requires

physical strength and dexterity as well as emotional and special intelligence, good planning,

and communication skills. I think it's good for women to see ourselves as able to use and build these skills."

To commemorate International Women's Day, Women's History Month, and Habitat for Humanity's Women Build Week, Greater Springfield Habitat will host a "Women Build" kickoff on Wednesday, March 12, at White Lion Brewing's Community Boom Room. White Lion is at 1500 Main St, in Springfield. The event kicks off at 6pm, and is free to attend. No registration is required.

Follow us on social media



Sponsorship Levels

Individual: Friend of Habitat

- Peer-to-peer fundraising model, encouraged to raise \$250
- Access to monthly-designated volunteer days
- Habitat gift

Team: Ambassador: \$1,500

- 5 volunteers on site during a monthly designated **Women Build** volunteer day
- Recognition on our website and social media
- **Women Build** t-shirts for team members

Team: Community Builder: \$3,000

- 8 volunteers on site during a monthly-designated **Women Build** volunteer day
- Recognition on our website and social media
- **Women Build** t-shirts for team members

Sponsor: Empowerment: \$5,000

- Team exclusive build day for up to 10 volunteers
- Bring a banner to hang on build site during your build day
- Recognition on our website and social media
- **Women Build** t-shirts for team members

Sponsor: Golden Nail: \$10,000

- 2 team exclusive build days for up to 10 volunteers
- Bring a banner to hang on build site during your build days.
- Recognition on our website and social media
- **Women Build** t-shirts for team members

How to participate

Individuals and teams fundraise, or they may choose to sponsor, and then build for a day (or two), together contributing to make a home affordable. Build days are from 8:30am to 3:30pm

Fundraising teams have access to an easy-to-use, secure online donation platform that can be personalized and shared with family, friends, and colleagues.





Photo credit: UMass DesignBuild

The University of Massachusetts DesignBuild team of students and professors pose with soon-to-be new homeowners Damaris (center left in mustard yellow jacket) and her husband Pedro at the Holyoke site. The project is a unique collaboration between Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity, Holyoke Housing Authority, and the UMass DesignBuild program.

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the new home to Pedro and his wife Damaris, longtime Holyoke residents.

“I’m so excited to see what the students design for Pedro and Damaris. They were such an enthusiastic group when we recently shared the news with them and the family,” said Olga Callirgos, GSHFH Homeowner Programs coordinator. “The students were attentive and kind, and some even attempted to speak to Pedro and Damaris in Spanish, even though it wasn’t their first language. This project is a learning experience for all of us and I hope we can do more projects like this in the future.”

Naomi Darling, design studio professor at Mount Holyoke College and UMass Architecture Department, agreed.

“There is a unanimous accord. The highlight of this

project, thus far, has been seeing Pedro and Damaris react to the news that they would soon be homeowners,” she said. “The joy on their faces was incredibly moving and reaffirmed our commitment to deliver a home that will house their dreams and memories for years to come.”

Home design is scheduled to begin this spring with construction commencing this summer. The house is expected to be delivered in the fall. The design will emphasize the energy efficiency via highly-insulated and air-sealed exterior assemblies, triple-glazed windows, all-electric appliances/utilities, and low-embodied carbon building materials, such as wood fiber, hemp, and straw, said Ben Leinfelder, construction manager of UMass Building and Construction Technology.

“Our hope is that the students enter the workforce as ethical, responsible designers and constructors to the benefit of our communities and the people who call these houses “home,” Naomi said.

While some may view the house as “tiny,” the UMass DesignBuild team prefers to call it “modest.” It will encompass the comfort and convenience of a larger home, but with a more compact and manageable footprint. The one-bedroom home will have full-sized appliances and fixtures in the kitchen and bathroom, and plenty of storage throughout the home.

“It’s the perfect size for a couple or single person who wants the lifestyle and private outdoor space of a single-family home without the heating bill and added maintenance of a

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larger, older house,” Naomi said. “This is exactly the scale of home that is missing in our housing market and for which there is an increasing demand.”

Families applying for the homeownership opportunity had to be clients of the HHA’s self-sufficiency program; earn between 35% and 60% of the area median income for Hampden County; have a positive credit history showing timely payments; a debt-to-income ratio of less than 43%; and the ability to pay 29% of their household income toward a mortgage.

Additionally, future

homeowners are required to perform sweat equity, which is Habitat’s hands-on investment. To keep costs affordable, selected Habitat families work alongside

volunteers on the construction of their home, participate in office activities, or at events.

Pedro, who is retired, attended every info session, and submitted the necessary forms two days after the application cycle opened. He and his wife currently live in a one-bedroom

apartment and have complained about their unfriendly neighbors who they say makes their everyday life unenjoyable. Pedro and Damaris don’t have children together, but

have a large blended family. Pedro has two daughters from a previous relationship and seven grandchildren. Damaris has three children and five grandchildren.

“All of our family selections are by lottery. Pedro and Damaris passed all qualifications with flying colors to be included in the lottery. They are also very dedicated to achieving the dream of homeownership, which they were starting to believe was impossible due to the current housing market,” said Vivian Rodriguez, HHA Homeownership Education coordinator and interpreter for the couple.

When Pedro and Damaris received the news of their acceptance into the project, Pedro said he was quite surprised. “I didn’t think they had picked anyone yet and HHA said I was just coming for an info session. This is such a dream. We were very surprised.”

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 - Naomi Darling, design studio professor at Mount Holyoke College and University of Massachusetts Architecture Department

