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Women's History Month, March 2022

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity

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NEWS

March 2022



Top left: Violeta K. Melendez, a student at Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy, tapes seams at the Bay Street, Springfield, site to prepare the walls for painting.

Win-win: GSHFH receives grant to support vocational students on build site

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) continues to broaden its impact, thanks to a recent grant from Stanley Black & Decker. The Connecticut-based tool and hardware manufacturer awarded GSHFH through its “Empower Makers” Global Impact Challenge, which supports vocational skills training and reskilling programs in the construction and manufacturing fields.

Two students from Springfield’s Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy are benefitting from the challenge and are working

at Greater Springfield Habitat build sites and learning about construction.

“Over the last several decades, vocational schools and careers in the trades have been overshadowed, despite the excellent, well-paying jobs and career paths they offer,” said Jim Loree, Stanley Black & Decker CEO. “Our goal is to recognize and advance those organizations that are working to create the skilled workers and tradespeople of the future that our society needs. For those workers displaced by the pandemic, especially women,

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Habitat homeowner empowers women, gives back to community

Karina said she understands what it's like to receive a blessing. After all, she's a Greater Springfield for Humanity (GSHFH) homeowner. She and her husband purchased their Monson house in 2008. Now, she's in the business of granting blessings to others, particularly women through her own nonprofit organization.

In 2014, Karina founded Afri(K)que, which addresses, educates, coordinates, and provides aid to financially-challenged women. The mission is to fight against hunger, homelessness, and poverty. To do this, Karina and her volunteers collect handmade jewelry, clothing, shoes, toiletries, and gift cards, to distribute to women in Western Massachusetts. The organization also supports three women in Togo, West Africa, who sew batik, bazin, and kente clothing. A fourth woman makes handbags.

"Giving back is so important, considering we are blessed in our own ways and there are other people in need who are disadvantaged and don't have the means to take care of themselves," Karina said. Afri(K)que recently hosted its International Women's Day celebration on March 5 in Chicopee. The event featured exhibitors, vendors, and festive performances. "Females have many talents, but sometimes are unable to afford a decent meal. We are building security, confidence, self-sufficiency, independence, hope, and self-esteem by using the arts as a means of empowerment."

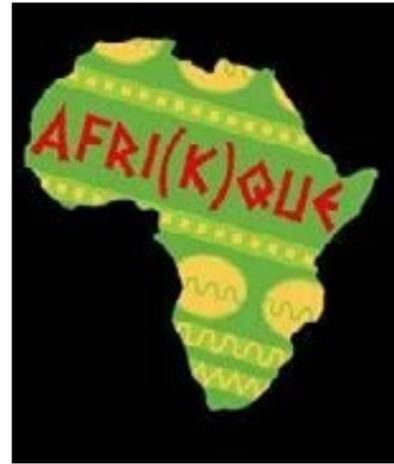
Karina said she likens what she does for women to what GSHFH does for its partner families. Prior to purchasing their Habitat home, Karina, her husband, and young son lived in a small apartment. There wasn't enough room to spread out their belongings



Top and above: pictures from the March 5 International Women's Day celebration hosted by Afri(K)que in Chicopee.

or for her son to play. Now, they live in a three-bedroom ranch house with a picturesque view. There's a front yard and backyard. The neighborhood is peaceful. The neighbors are friendly and the family often sees wildlife prancing on the property.

"Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity is giving random people a chance to own a house built from the ground up and nothing replaces the feeling of being the first owners," Karina said. "This



Afri(K)que is:

Arts and crafts
Finding
Reasons
In girls and women
on a quest
(K)arina's signature
as founder
Quest to be
United for
Empowerment

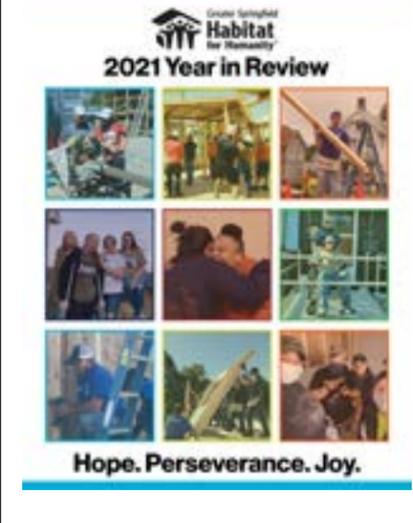
experience has made us all more appreciative of life. In other words, we consider this a blessing."

Deborah O'Mara, GSHFH Family Services manager, who attended the celebration, agreed and said she's in awe of Karina.

"We help families find safety, stability, and security in their own homes in the hopes that they then turn around and help other people in need, sort of like a continuous chain of giving," Deborah said. "Karina exemplifies this ideal. We helped her family and she is helping women in the US and in Africa."

For more information on Afri(K)que, go to afrikque.com.

The annual report is here. Check it out at habitatspringfield.org/news



Advocate on behalf of Greater Springfield Habitat. To learn more, go to habitatspringfield.org/advocacy

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people of color, and veterans, we want to encourage them to trade up to a career in the trades.”

Seniors Violeta K. Melendez and Shirley Pinto came to GSHFH in January and work a one-week-on/one-week-off schedule. The young women spend a full week at school one week. The next week, they are at a build site daily from 7:30am to 3:30pm. They will rotate as such until the end of May.

“We’re happy to have forged a partnership with Greater Springfield Habitat with the possibility to grow the program in years to come,” said Victor Santos of the Putnam Cooperative Education office. “This opportunity offers students a hands-on education beyond the four walls of the school, plus it’s an opportunity to build relationships.”

Since their arrival, Violeta and Shirley have installed wood flooring, mudded and sanded dry wall in preparation for painting, and built cabinets.

“I actually thought we would just be building the house, as in the frame work,” said Violeta, 17. The Springfield resident said she hopes to stay with Habitat following graduation, join a union, and do a four-year apprenticeship.

Seventeen-year-old Shirley said she knows she’s not as experienced as the rest of the construction crew, but she enjoys being on the build site.

“This experience is [exceeding] my expectations,” she said. “I love learning new things and going back to school to show or tell my teachers what I’ve learned that they haven’t already taught us.”

Shirley said following graduation, she would like to move from Springfield to Florida and possibly join a union and study architecture.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Violeta K. Melendez
Putnam co-op student
of Springfield, MA



What is your useless talent? I can do bird calls with my hands.

Have you ever met a celebrity? If not, who would you like to meet? I would love to meet BTS. BTS is a K-pop band. I would like to meet them because I was with depression and when I was dealing with so many things in my life, their music would make me feel better because of the meaning in their songs. I just want to thank them for helping me and comforting me.

What’s your favorite random fact? When cats are laying on you and they are purring, it’s them giving you a massage to relieve the knots and pressure you have.

What movie do you wish you could watch again for the first time? I would love to watch *Spirited Away*. When I first saw that movie I lived in Puerto Rico and I watched it at nighttime with one of my older sisters and my younger brother.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Shirley Pinto
Putnam co-op student
of Springfield, MA



What is the dumbest way you’ve been injured? I was riding a bike and the chain locked in place and I flew off the bike and hit a tree.

Would you rather go 30 days without your phone or your entire life without dessert?
Why? I would say 30 days without my phone because there are days that my phone may overwhelm me and I need a break from all of the social media. Dessert is needed once in a while and it makes every meal end the right way.

What weird food combinations do you love? I love asparagus and mushrooms together. I don’t think it’s a weird combination, but it’s not something everyone likes.

What Disney princess would make the best spy?
Moana could be a good spy because of her adventurous personality and urge to get things back to what they were before.

What was your favorite TV showing growing up? My favorite TV show was *iCarly*.