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NEWS

October 2021



Fall Feastival 2021 save-the-date card.

Buy Fall Feastival tickets today

Have you started Christmas shopping? Halloween and Thanksgiving will soon be behind us. Are you ready for Christmas? Let Fall Feastival be your opportunity to get your shopping done early. At just \$50 a ticket – a \$25 savings from previous years – the evening promises hours of well-deserved fun and networking opportunities. Plus, it's Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's biggest fundraiser of the year.

This year marks the event's 20th year. Stop by and enjoy sweet and savory samplings from local restaurants, including Nadim's Downtown Mediterranean Grill, Elegant Affairs, and Mamma Mia's. Bid on silent auctions to win featured prizes such as an overnight stay at the Red Lion Inn, gift baskets, tickets, and family memberships to local and regional attractions.

Be a part of this worthwhile event that raises money for Greater Springfield Habitat. For more information, go to habitatspringfield.org/fall-feastival

**Fall Feastival
Nov. 4, 5:30pm
Twin Hills Country
Club, Longmeadow
\$50 each**
[habitatspringfield.org/
fall-feastival](http://habitatspringfield.org/fall-feastival)

Individual with lofty nationwide goal volunteers at Holyoke build site

Will Wetzel isn't your average Habitat for Humanity volunteer. He's rather unique with an extraordinary goal. The New Jersey native aims to participate in a Habitat build in every state. To date, he's worked on build sites in six states – Texas, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Massachusetts. On Sept. 25, Will participated in a Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) build in Holyoke.

Will said he devised this goal after participating on a build site in Laredo, Texas, while in college at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. The university's Campus Ministry had organized a service trip over spring break. He enjoyed the activity so much, he wanted to do more, explore new places, and experience different cultures within America.

"Working on these Habitat builds has been a life-changing experience for me," Will said. "I have Villanova University to thank for introducing me to Habitat for Humanity. I would not have learned about the organization if I wasn't selected for one of Villanova's service trips."

When he explored Massachusetts Habitats, Will said he had a list of requirements he wanted the affiliate to meet. They included a convenient location, updated website and active social media presence, and if it's accepting new volunteers. Greater Springfield met the stipulations. Will said he left New Jersey on the evening of Sept. 24 and drove to Western Massachusetts to ensure he'd be at the build site for 8:30 the next morning.

"It's not every day you get a call



Volunteers Tom Eisenman (left) and Will Wetzel sit and enjoy a break at the Holyoke build site on Sept. 25.

from a volunteer who lives so far away and says, 'I want to find out how I can help you on one of your project sites. I'll be up in the area on Saturday, Sept 25'," said John O'Farrell, GSHFH Fundraising and Volunteer coordinator. "We feel very fortunate to have passed the test for consideration and to be involved in Will's lifelong quest to visit so many Habitats across the country. We wish him well on his plans for the future, and thank you, Will, for making a difference here in Western Massachusetts."

During his day-long volunteer experience, Will said he did work that was new to him.

"Working on these Habitat builds has been a life-changing experience for me."

- Will Wetzel, volunteer

"What makes Habitat builds so special is that the homes are always in different stages of completion, so you never truly know what you'll be working on until you arrive on the job site," Will said. "In the six builds that I have done so far, no

task has been repeated."

In addition to gaining construction experience, Will said volunteering at Habitat build sites has helped shaped his professional character as he is able to continually improve soft skills – interpersonal communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

Continued on Page 4

Welcome, Johnnie!

Habitat homeowner's child joins board of directors

He may be brand new to the Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Board of Directors, but John "Johnnie" Gomez is no stranger to the organization. In fact, he may be the most uniquely qualified member on the team. After all, his parents own a Habitat home.

In 2010, when Johnnie was just 15 years old, his parents purchased a newly renovated home on Sylvan Street in Springfield. So, Johnnie knows and understands the Habitat culture from the "other side."

"I know how hard it is to go through the process of being selected. I know about the sweat equity hours and how that works," Johnnie said. "I know what it feels like to go through and own a Habitat for Humanity house from seeing my parents do it."

Prior to his parents buying the Habitat house, Johnnie said he remembers growing up in rough Springfield neighborhoods. But, his parents were determined to keep Johnnie and his siblings safe in a stable and loving environment. Johnnie said his parents signed him up for sports and he played year-round baseball or basketball.

After his parents were selected for the Habitat house, Johnnie helped them complete the required sweat equity hours. He also assisted his aunt and a family friend with the sweat equity hours for their Habitat houses. He enjoyed the work and studied it at Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technology High School, before it became an academy. Upon graduation, Johnnie worked in the carpentry trade, but at the University of Massachusetts at



Johnnie Gomez

Dartmouth, he switched gears and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. These days, Johnnie is a project engineer at Northeast Paving. He also serves on the Putnam Academy Carpentry Advisory Board.

"I think living in a Habitat house inspired me to keep pushing forward," Johnnie said. "If my parents can put in the time and effort to finally own a house of their own, I can achieve the goals I have as well."

Johnnie said as a member of the GSHFH board, he can share his knowledge, construction expertise, and give back to the community that gave him so much. GSHFH Executive Director Aimee Giroux agreed.

"I can remember first meeting Johnnie when he was a senior in high school and how excited he was to be heading off to college. It is great to see how much he has achieved and grown as a person," Aimee said. "I was delighted when he expressed an interest to join the board and think that he can bring a unique perspective to the team."

SPOTLIGHT ON

Johnnie Gomez
Board member
of Springfield, MA

If you lived 500 years ago, what do you think your profession would be? A farmer, planting my own crops and raising my own animals.

If money were no object, how would you spend your time? Traveling the world

Which celebrity do you shamelessly follow in the news? J-Lo

Which movie has made you laugh the most? "Step Brothers" or "The 40-Year-Old Virgin"

What is the most obscure super power you'd want? Night vision

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Continued from Page 2

Will graduated from Villanova in 2018 and works in the health care media business field.

Veteran volunteer Tom Eisenman, who worked with Will at the Holyoke build site, said he was impressed with Will's determination and go-getter attitude. They had been assigned the task of installing floor joists in the marked locations. It's not an easy job.

"The joists are heavy and have to be secured with nails 3.5 inches long. It's a tough job because you often have to stand in an awkward position. It's easy to miss the nail head and a lot of force is needed to drive those nails," Tom said. "It can be very frustrating for a beginner because each time a nail bends, it has to be pulled and done over."

Tom and Will completed the project in roughly three hours.

"Will didn't let the bent nails deter him," Tom said. "If new volunteers haven't grown up in a family where mom or dad is a builder, it can be hard the first few times, and many probably decide not to continue. But, Will has 44 more states to go."

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