Congratulations, Candy Wonderland

Gingerbread House Contest winner

Top left: Edgar Herrera, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Construction crew member, stands on stilts while taping at a Springfield build site. Top right: GSHFH Construction Manager Sheri L. Green (left) and Edgar work on framing at a Springfield build site.

From now until March 31, Lowe’s Home Improvement customers can donate their change at the register and 100% of all donations will support the Habitat for Humanity International Global Impact Fund to build the capacity of the network, sustain existing programs, and design innovative programs.

Construction team member proves to be a role model

To many, Edgar Herrera is a quiet and unassuming young member of Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity’s (GSHFH) construction crew. But to those who work closely with him, he’s an invaluable asset and fundamental element of the team.

Edgar’s success didn’t come overnight. No, it’s been several years in the making. But, in that time, his supervisors say he has transformed from a reluctant and unsure teenager into a confident leader eager to learn and refine his skills, and expand his prospects.

Edgar is also a student at Springfield Technical Community College studying Civil Engineering Technologies and working toward his next chapter. He said he anticipates a 2024 graduation year and will then pursue a Bachelor of Science degree at a nearby college or university.

“It’s been a drastic change,” said Sheri L. Green, GSHFH Construction manager. “He was shy, unsure of his next step, and his knowledge was a little bit here and there. Now, he takes on projects, gives opinions, is matter-
Liz Persch, clerk for the Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors and a former staffer, poses during her one of her Habitat mission trips to Guatemala.

Although she’s new to the clerk path,” said Aimee Giroux, GSHFH executive director. “Michael joined the board after volunteering and has shown real commitment in a short amount of time with stepping into the vice president role. He has a great amount of enthusiasm and I am very excited to have both Michael and Liz on the board while we work on ways to strengthen our programming to serve more families.”

Anne Eisenman, GSHFH board president, agreed. “Even before their election to the executive committee, Michael and Liz took on leadership roles through their active participation in our recent board retreat and development of the affiliate’s strategic plan,” Anne said. “I’m looking forward to working with them for the next year.”

Prior to working at GSHFH, Liz managed the home ownership and home preservation programs. As a member of the executive committee, Michael gained an appreciation for the Habitat mission, learned new skills, and bonded with his peers from the personal injury law firm based in Springfield.

As vice president, Michael will assume the president’s duties in her absence and serve as the chief executive officer to whom the executive director reports and will run board meetings. Additionally, as a member of the executive committee, the vice president will also help determine board meeting agendas.

“In the short time I have been with the board, I have seen firsthand all the good things Habitat for Humanity does for the community and I wanted to play a bigger part in that,” Michael said. “I grew up in Springfield so I’m familiar with the area and the problems the folks in this community face. There are so many hardworking people that are struggling everyday to make ends meet and put food on the table. These are the people who need our help the most.”

Good luck, Michael and Liz.

Michael Cardaropoli, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors vice president.

Board welcomes two existing members to leadership roles

Congratulations, Liz and Michael

J an. 1 is a special date at Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) and signifies the start of a new leadership team on the board of directors. In December, two executive members stepped down and two general members filled their positions. This year, we introduce former Greater Springfield Habitat staffer Liz Persch as clerk and Michael Cardaropoli as vice president.

Western Massachusetts natives Liz and Michael joined the board in 2015 and have an active presence, participating in the recent organization retreat, annual Fall Festival fundraiser, and monthly meetings. Both said their goal is to further the awareness of the organization in the community and help the families who depend on Habitat.

“I enjoyed working with Liz when she was a GSHFH employee and it think it speaks well of both Greater Springfield Habitat and her commitment to the mission that she wants to be on the board as clerk to support Habitat even though she had chosen new career paths,” said Aimee Giroux, GSHFH executive director. “Michael joined the board after volunteering and has shown real commitment in a short amount of time with stepping into the vice president role. He has a great amount of enthusiasm and I am very excited to have both Michael and Liz on the board while we work on ways to strengthen our programming to serve more families.”

Anne Eisenman, GSHFH board president, agreed. “Even before their election to the executive committee, Michael and Liz took on leadership roles through their active participation in our recent board retreat and development of the affiliate’s strategic plan,” Anne said. “I’m looking forward to working with them for the next year.”

Prior to working at GSHFH, Liz said she worked in Boston at a corporate job. In 2015, she received an email from Greater Springfield Habitat informing her of a volunteering opportunity in Guatemala. She applied and was accepted. Liz said she enjoyed the experience so much she quit her Boston job and went to work at Habitat. In her time, Liz managed the home ownership and home preservation programs. Even though she no longer works for GSHFH, Liz said she still wants to be involved and being on the board and filling a leadership role gives her an opportunity to do just that.

As clerk, Liz will write the minutes for each meeting, including retreats, update the board roster with the Massachusetts Secretary of State’s office, and sometimes sign contracts and grants. Although she’s new to the clerk position, Liz said she already has a goal for the board. “I would like every board member to have the background information and confidence about what Habitat does so they can be a community spokesperson for the organization.”

Michael was introduced to GSHFH when he and several Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley colleagues participated in the “Tommy’s House” build. Formally known as Marine Gunnery Sgt. Thomas J. Sullivan, the project honored the Springfield native who had been killed in the Chattanooga, Tennessee, shootings in July 2015. The house had later been purchased by a soldier and his family in 2019. Through the course of the experience, Michael gained an appreciation for the Habitat mission, learned new skills, and bonded with his peers from the personal injury law firm based in Springfield.

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“In the short time I have been with the board, I have seen firsthand all the good things Habitat for Humanity does for the community and I wanted to play a bigger part in that,” Michael said. “I grew up in Springfield so I’m familiar with the area and the problems the folks in this community face. There are so many hardworking people that are struggling everyday to make ends meet and put food on the table. These are the people who need our help the most.”

Good luck, Michael and Liz.
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of-factly on the hows and whys as to the way something is done. He’s a great trainer and has even lost his fear of heights.”

Mary Melchiskey, Greater Springfield Habitat Construction supervisor, agreed.

“He’s always asking what he can do next. He asks a lot of great questions and is continually trying to improve his carpentry skills. I’ve truly enjoyed working with Edgar,” Mary said. “We just need to convince him he doesn’t have to cut his boards a little long.”

Edgar came to Greater Springfield Habitat while he was a senior studying carpentry at Springfield’s Roger L. Putnam Vocational-Technical Academy. At the time, Habitat had been building a three-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom home on Orchard Street in Springfield. Soon, the COVID-19 pandemic struck and restrictions limited the number of people allowed on a build site. GSHFH reached out to Putnam teachers asking if any students might be interested in working for Habitat to complete the house. Edgar and two other students were hired. Today, only Edgar remains.

Edgar said his interest in construction began at Putnam where he learned how to use power tools. His fascination grew as his knowledge expanded and he became more comfortable using the machinery. He has learned better ways to do certain projects, including using a jigsaw to install flooring versus a circular saw. He said he also discovered the practicality of his skills and can repair a damaged door or broken window.

“I like working at GSHFH,” said Edgar, 20. “We do something different every time and I can work with more experienced people than me and volunteers who have different points of view and different ways of doing something. They have other methods of building.”

Edgar said he’s also learned a great deal from his supervisors, such as it’s OK not to know everything; and if you don’t know, ask so no one gets hurt or the task doesn’t have to be redone.

While he’s unsure of what the future holds after he earns his associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, he knows he enjoys construction and would like to do something with it. Regardless of what he chooses, he’ll always have a place at Greater Springfield Habitat. Just ask Sheri.

“I want him to stay forever. He’ll always have a job here with me,” she said. “His work ethic is impeccable. He’s always there, early, and ready to go. He’s very talented and he makes sure he gets the job done right the first time, neatly, and he’s not haphazard. He’s a good young man.”

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Construction Supervisor Mary Melchiskey (in white) and with Edgar Herrera, GSHFH Construction crew member, carry the next window they’ll install to its location at a Springfield build site.

If you had to make a house out of food, what kind of food would you choose? French fries from Wendy’s

What’s a pet peeve you’d make illegal? Chewing with your mouth open.

If you ran for president, what would be your slogan? No more inflation.

Is cereal a soup? Kind of.

What musician would make the best teacher? HM Surf

Donating your car is simple and free. Learn more about vehicle donations: habitat springfield.org/cars-for-homes