

Habitat offers life-changing opportunity with a home

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shovels gone into the ground and concrete forming took place than a call went out for volunteers to build portions of the house. There is a schedule of tasks and each week focuses on a variety of those jobs done by teams of a half to two dozen people.

All electrical and plumbing work is done by certified tradespersons.

"Any type of building supplies are welcome, especially lumber. We love lumber," laughed Habitat Halton executive director John Gerrard, who spoke with the *Oakville Beaver* via phone conference at the build site.

Slightly-used tools or those that can be refurbished are also very welcome, while brand new tools are true gifts, according to Gerrard.

Jambrovic said corporate teams are a big help, such as the Metroland Media involvement.

Skilled tradespersons and retired or semi-retired people who know their way around a build site or, as Gerrard billed them, "Handy Mannys" are also on the 'Most Needed-list'.

Not that Habitat doesn't have things well in-hand.

The Oakville build is the first of an aggressive plan by Habitat for the short term.

A Habitat Halton ReStore, which sells donated furniture and building materials at reduced prices, is to open in Milton this spring. The existing ReStore in Burlington diverts usable materials from landfills annually and its proceeds cover Habitat Halton's administrative costs.

Habitat Halton plans to begin construction on two semi-detached homes in Milton this spring/summer and a 12-unit townhouse complex and one bungalow in Burlington. One of the homes will be accessible, which is significant, too.

While Genworth Canada, a firm that deals in mortgages, and OMDREB's expertise in real estate was a match made in heaven in Oakville, similar sponsors are responsible for the other Halton builds.

In Milton, it's Whirlpool Canada and the Canadian Institute of Plumbing and Heating (CIPH). In Burlington, Whirlpool Canada is again behind the projects.

In Acton, Habitat is laying the groundwork to build nine, or more, affordable homes on a site.

In fact, Habitat's board has set the ambitious goal of building 75 homes over the next five years — some 15 homes per year.

"It is exciting. There is quite a large need in Halton where one in nine people is living in poverty," said Goldrup.

All are supported by other corporate sponsors that support the builds through products, materials, or labour.

As builders-for-the-day, like those from the Metroland Media team, ask questions about the home, its features and the family that will live in it, Goldrup said the Oakville family is anxiously awaiting the new digs.

"They are excited and thrilled about having the opportunity to own their own home," she said. "Owning a home is a dream of theirs that they were not able to do on their own. With our help, their

dream is coming true."

"It will change their lives," said Silva, who patiently explains the intricacies of homebuilding techniques to the inexperienced and then begins all over again the following day — sometimes working weekends, sometimes evenings — all with the conviction that it's work worth doing, that it will change a family's life.

For a family to be selected for a Habitat Halton home, they must fulfill numerous conditions.

They must be living in either unsafe or unhealthy conditions, substandard or overcrowded housing conditions, or have high rent relative to their income. They must commit volunteering 500

hours of 'sweat equity' towards construction of their home, a new Habitat home that is not their own, or to Habitat programs. They must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada. They must have consistent work history and have a minimum annual employment income of \$24,000 to afford a mortgage. The income cannot come from Social Assistance (Ontario Works) or Employment Insurance.

For information, visit www.habitathalton.ca.

— With files from David Lea

For more photos, visit www.insidehalton.com or see a video of the day at <http://bit.ly/1iUTm5z>.



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