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NOVEMBER 2022 Newsletter

Our New Homeowners

Kristina and Adam Baker were looking at various homes within Berkshire County shortly after their twins were born. At that time, they were living in a two-bedroom apartment with a family of five (Adam, Kristina, Angelique 15 years old, Ryleigh and Nathan 5 years old). There was a three-bedroom apartment that opened up six weeks after the twins were born, and knowing that they needed another bedroom at a minimum they took it. It was not long before they were overcrowded in the tiny three bedrooms. So, Kristina and Adam picked up their search for a house that would be large enough for the five of them. One of the routes they chose to take was Habitat for Humanity. They knew about Habitat for Humanity and the opportunities the organization provided for low income families to get into a home, and the skills to be a successful home owner.

They love the experience of working on building their home. There is a deeper feeling of pride in knowing how much work they are putting into building their own home. Adam enjoys being able to use the skills that he learned in the Building Trades shop at C.H. McCann Tech. This is also the second house that he has worked on with Habitat for Humanity, the first one being back in 1997-1998. For Kristina it's a whole new experience. She has never worked construction or had hands on experience like this before. They feel building your own home gives you a different sense of ownership.

Adam and Kristina are extremely excited, proud, happy, and beyond grateful watching each step of the process taking shape into their future home. The Bakers spend time together talking about how the twins will have a yard to play in. They want to put a swing set and sandbox in the backyard for them. They dream about other things like a fire pit to enjoy, sitting on the porch having their morning coffee, decorating the outside of their home for Christmas, having Thanksgiving dinner with their family, and maybe some raised garden beds for some fresh herbs and vegetables.

At first, they felt out of place. They were just there to work the hours needed for the sweat equity. As the weeks progressed, they started to become more comfortable with the Habitat crew, and to feel more like a part of the team. It is no longer about putting in the hours. It is about building a home for a family, and in this case it is their family. After this house is built, Adam hopes to have the opportunity to continue helping the Habitat crew in building houses for future families.

House Construction Maple Street

The Maple Street house is coming together quickly. We have completed our framing and have passed our framing inspection. The roof is shingled. Currently we are working feverishly to complete and seal up the exterior. As this article is being written the windows are being installed. Before Thanksgiving all the windows should be in and we will begin installing rock-wool insulation on the outside of the house. Our plan is to then move inside for the winter and complete the inside. Then next spring we will install the vinyl siding and complete the exterior work. We hope to have the home ready for the new homeowners by next fall.

We have a very dedicated, reliable, talented and hard-working group of volunteers, male and female, young and old. Each Wednesday, Friday and Saturday morning they can be depended on to be there and complete any task asked of them. They are skilled, friendly and welcoming and a real joy to work with. We start our construction at 8 AM and end around 12 noon. New volunteers are always welcome as long as you are 18 years of age. So stop by Maple Street in Williamstown and see the project and meet the volunteers, see the house and join us.



Perspective From a New Volunteer

I joined the effort to build the Habitat house on Maple Street off Cole Avenue in May. Starting with a poured foundation and basic site work, the project has progressed building exterior walls, installing floor joists, exterior sheathing, a set of stairs, roof trusses and decking and more in what to my eyes is remarkable speed. All of this has been accomplished by a crew of folks, men and women, energetic and so willing. And what a crew it is! The voluntary commitment to the project is extraordinary and the commitment to one another even more so. Three mornings each week they appear. They share a range of skills with those having teaching those without (including this writer) with patience and endless good humor.

We have fun with one another, teasing, telling good stories, blaming in the best fashion the absent for mistakes made by those present and making jokes about the miserable wages. Most impressive is the general habit of the crew members of telling one another if they will be unable to join the work on a specific day or days and then offering reasons for their absence! The service to community and the ultimate homeowner offered by the crew is by itself a sufficient justification for whatever time and work invested by individual volunteers but this habit demonstrates the powerful bond among crew members. Such camaraderie is a source of great enjoyment and provides a sustaining boost to the progress of the project.

The moral components of Habitat's mission are obvious and those moral attributes provide a powerful impulse to the volunteer. The goodness of this work was the source of my own decision to engage. But what has been the most unexpected was the generosity, morale and new friendships made possible by the community of volunteers in this joint effort. I am thrilled to be a part of this work and encourage others to engage at whatever level of time and resources you can provide to the mission of Habitat.

by Don Dubendorf



Our thanks for support of our 14 Maple Street Project

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We are always eager to welcome individuals who may be interested in talking with us about serving as a volunteer, and we have several ways you might consider. Although the most visible form of volunteering is to participate in construction projects, we also welcome those who may want to participate in community relations and events, publicity, family selection, grant writing and fund-raising. Please contact us if you would like to explore how you can become involved in our work.

Do you have a car you'd like to donate?

Northern Berkshire Habitat for Humanity is now participating in the Cars for Homes program. Your donated vehicle will help build the next home.

To donate a car, call 877-277-4344.

<https://www.habitat.org/support/donate-your-car>



Our Continuing Mission Over 30 Years

Northern Berkshire Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1990 and since that time has been working to meet the housing needs of Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, Williamstown, and Stamford, VT. Our projects include building new homes and renovating existing houses. As of October 2021, Northern Berkshire Habitat has completed 14 home buildings or renovations, serving 14 families, and an estimated 68 people including parents, children and foster children. This includes the mother and two children who just moved in to our newest house on Cole Avenue. We have also performed 12 Brush with Kindness critical repair or ramp projects impacting 23 people. With the support of Habitat contributors, homeowners achieve the strength, stability, and self reliance needed to build a better life for themselves and their families.



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Brush for Kindness/Veterans Programs

Between house construction our volunteers are continuing to assist several other families with Brush with Kindness/Critical Repair projects including Veteran's projects. After completing the Cole Avenue house last November, over the winter months we completed two veteran's projects and three Brush with Kindness projects.

Helping our veterans who so valiantly served our nation in our time of need, the volunteers of Habitat built a small deck and flight of stairs and repaired a statue for a North Adams veteran. The project involved digging four-foot-deep holes and jack hammering out an old foundation that had shifted, installing sonotubes then building the deck and stairs along with new lattice work around the entire porch. For another veteran in Adams, we installed a new front door, replacing one broken by first responders to his home.

Additionally, we completed three Brush with Kindness projects, serving three families in North Adams. We were able to repair a doorway, fix a kitchen cabinet, and provide safety railings for an elderly person.

We are a small affiliate, with a small group of volunteers, just ordinary people making an extraordinary difference in people's lives. Come join us.

Our veterans program, supported by funds from the Turner House, is designed to help veterans with their housing needs under our Brush with Kindness/Critical Repairs program. Non-veterans can also apply to these programs if they can provide funding for materials. These programs focus on exterior minor repairs that make a home safer, healthier and more accessible. Among other minor repairs, we build access ramps so folks can get home and stay home safely.

Applicants must:

- Have lived in Northern Berkshire or Stamford, VT for at least one full year prior to application date.
- Own their own home.
- Earn no more than 80% of the Median income for Northern Berkshire.
- (Non-veterans) Be able to fund the costs of materials.
- (Veterans) Be Honorably Discharged.

To learn more about the Brush for Kindness Program and to request an application, contact Northern Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, (413) 664-4440, office@northberkshirehabitat.org, P.O. Box 391, North Adams, MA 01247.



But It's just one house.

How much of an effect can just one house have? There is story of a child strolling the beach after a storm had washed up many starfish. A child set about tossing the stranded starfish back into the water. Along came an adult and asked what they were doing. "I am saving the starfish," was the reply. "You can't possibly make a difference," the skeptic retorted "there are so many and you are just one". "Made a difference to that one", the child proclaimed as one more starfish ker-plopped into the water to find a new home.

What difference does just one house make? When that house becomes a home, it makes all the difference. The family that moved into the most recently completed Habitat house has made a home. "We can't stress how much we love the house." What was once a vacant lot now has a lawn with bicycles, toys, a pet dog, and a porch full of flowerpots. Two children watched the house being built and wondered if they would someday have such a place to live. For a while they were simply informed that the house was being built for someone. Finally, the paper work was complete and they could delight in knowing they were the "someone" the house was being built for. Two youngsters have a room for sleep, study, and play. The young son shortly after moving in informed the family that this is a special house, built for us, and we must take good care of it. Instead of being stuck in a spiral of increasing rental costs the family is now facing a much more stable future. A parent has the opportunity to help strengthen a neighborhood. All are close enough to work and school to walk and save wear and tear on the family vehicle.

Just one house means one less family is stranded. A sense of self-assurance develops. They express a pride in being productive member of the community. One more family has a firmer path to a future of contributing rather than just getting by. A family is now "exactly where we want to be."

