

SPRING 2023

The Plumb Line

NEWS FROM ROCKFORD AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY



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A message from our Board President, Peter Schmeling

On behalf of the entire Board of Directors of the Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity, Happy Spring! Let me begin by thanking each one of you for your ongoing support during our annual campaign. Your contribution doesn't go unnoticed.



With Spring arriving and the snow melting off, build season is right around the corner! Build season is the most exciting and busy time of year for us. Watching each house go from a grassy lot to foundations, walls, roofs, and so on, is pure bliss. All the hard work from grant writing, to fundraising, and selling items at the Restore all culminates on each build site. Countless volunteer hours go into each home, and I would be remised if I didn't thank every weekday wonder who spends two or three days a week with us all Summer long.

Speaking of volunteers, we will be welcoming so many new ones this year to the build site with our Twenty-three in '23 corporate build. This is an exciting opportunity for 23 of the most generous companies to come together and donate time and treasure to our affiliate with a single goal of building a house. It will bring tons of exposure for our organization within the business community!

Our single largest source of income is still the Restore. Have you been there lately? They constantly have donations coming through the door that include many brand NEW items from Lowe's. I encourage you to stop by and check it out for yourself!

The build season is so close! Make some time to drive through our new neighborhood off of Springfield Avenue in Rockford and see the progress our teams of volunteers will be making. Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any comments, questions, or suggestions on our growing affiliate!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Schmeling". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Our Team

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Kenny Tucker, ReStore Truck Driver
James Weyrauch, ReStore Truck Driver

Looking Back, Planning Forward

In 2023, Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity (RAHFH) is immensely proud to be celebrating our 35th year of creating innovative housing solutions in the Rockford metropolitan area. This anniversary year calls for reflection on all we have accomplished, and it also brings excitement for all that lies ahead!

Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity was incorporated in Rockford in 1988 by a small group of individuals who understood that families with low incomes in Rockford needed more than rent subsidies and public housing options; they needed an equitable opportunity at the American dream of owning a home. The organization started out small. Two years after forming, we built our first home on Clover Avenue. Two years after that, we built two more. It took the first ten years of our existence to build ten homes. We were carefully building a legacy from the ground up.

But as we entered our second decade, RAHFH, which was initially operated purely by volunteers, slowly started to add staff. We steadily added more volunteers and donors. We opened the ReStore in 2007 to increase our self-sustainability and forged an innovative partnership with the Rockford Public Schools in 2016 to grow our construction capacity. We eventually expanded our work to include components of community building and critical home repairs, recognizing the need not only to create affordable housing opportunity but also to help maintain the affordability, safety, and livability of existing homes and neighborhoods.



Now, in 2023, 35 years after our humble beginnings, Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity has completed construction on 144 new houses; we have rehabbed 29 homes; and we are serving a minimum of 8 families through homeownership opportunity and 30 families through critical home repair each year. Owners of houses built and sold by RAHFH— 173 in all— have contributed over \$3,000,000 to the county in property taxes. In three-and-a-half decades, RAHFH has invested many millions of dollars and tens of thousands of hours of work into eight metro zip codes to ensure that Rockford's low-income families have an equitable chance at safe housing and bright futures.

While we are celebrating our past, we are not done growing and innovating for our future! We are working with more schools and school districts to teach construction trades, and we are exploring the use of geothermal energy and highly-energy efficient construction to close the widening energy burden gap between higher and lower income households. We are engaging more and more partners into our mission so we can get closer to our vision of a community where everyone has a safe place to live.

Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity's legacy is one that began small and grew progressively through dedicated work. Honoring where we have come from and where we are going is important to us because we recognize that three decades from now— just like three decades ago— home will be the key that opens so many other doors. Stay tuned for all of the fun ways in 2023 that you can join us to celebrate 35 years and building!

Homeownership

Homeownership is a dream so grand,
It can fill us with joy and command,
A feeling of security and care,
Is what brings to the ones who dare.

The walls painted with bright new hue,
A place for family, friends and you,
A place to gather and reminisce,
A place to call your own and never miss.

The garden with the blooms so grand,
A place to enjoy with your own hand,
A place to sit and watch the birds,
A place to relax, no worries, no words.

Homeownership is a precious gift,
It fills our hearts with delight and lift,
It brings us closer to our dreams,
A place to call home, it's what it means.



Welcome Home!

A home dedication and blessing were held earlier this year for our newest homeowner, Chrihauna and her family. Her home was known as the Daniel Nielsen Memorial Build. Daniel passed away in November 2021. This house was dedicated to him. Individuals and community partners came together to build Chrihauna her new home.



Construction Update

By Jack Turner, Construction Manager

Shatiqua's House:

The Guilford High School Build

The drywall has been completed and painting has started. The flooring and finishing work still needs to be done. The house will be dedicated in May.



Nakisha's House:

The East High School Build

The drywall has been completed, and the taping has started. Painting, flooring, and finishing work still needs to be done. The home will be dedicated in May.

Emerson Estates: The 2023 Builds

The digging of foundations started in the new subdivision. Lots are marked out. The concrete foundations began in March.



A retrospective on 2022 & Looking ahead to 2023

By Caitlyn Baylor, Grants & Special Initiatives Director

Each year at Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity is a whirlwind of activity— approving buyers, coordinating volunteers, raising walls, and before we know it, celebrating the completion of homes. It is always gratifying, once the dust settles, to look back on the incredible accomplishments of that year’s homebuyers.

We were extremely honored to work with seven households through their homebuying process last year. Six of these families built and purchased new construction on the southeast side, and one family rehabbed and bought an existing home on the northwest side. A majority of these households are also headed by women. Their households represented a range of careers in education, health care, and manufacturing. They also included two buyers currently in nursing school and one buyer who finished her master’s degree in social work! Between the seven households, there were 16 kids who moved into new homes, making children the largest demographic we served for the 34th year in a row. We are blown away by these powerful homebuyers who worked hard to balance purchasing a home with working full-time, completing ongoing education in many cases, and raising their families.

All seven of these homebuyers are now getting settled and beginning the work of turning their new houses into life-long homes. We offer each of them our warmest thanks for buying their homes through Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity and our sincere congratulations on their achievement.



THE PLUMB LINE

During our most recent application cycle, we accepted the largest number of mortgage applications in our organization's history. Over several months, a dedicated team of staff and volunteers worked to distill the nearly 300 applications down to nineteen approved buyers. Eleven of these homebuyers will be completing or starting a home in 2023 – let us introduce them!

Our 2023 homebuyers represent a diverse and hardworking pool of people. They work in the industries of healthcare, education, case work, and manufacturing. Several of them also run their own businesses on the side! And as if they aren't busy enough, two are currently in school for higher degrees related to their work in the medical field. Between the eleven households, there are twenty-eight kids who will be moving into new homes with them. They currently live in eight different zip codes across the Rockford area, and most of them will be buying homes on the southeast side, the northwest side, or the west side. Eight of these families will begin the construction or rehab process right away in the spring, and the other three will start in the fall with the beginning of the school year, as they will be buying homes built by Rockford Public School students in the construction trades pathway.

Despite their diverse careers, backgrounds, and lives, they share one powerful thing in common: they are working hard to buy their first homes. We wish all eleven of these families excitement – and maybe a little tenacity – for the fun, frantic, fulfilling homebuying road ahead this year!





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