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Building homes and communities: a matter of conscience and action

Habitat for Humanity volunteers work on Bowdoinham house

On a perfect September day, I joined about 30 other volunteers in Bowdoinham to put up the four outer walls of a modest house that by next spring will become a home for Bill Beaugregard and his 2-year-old son, Ian. Working with Bill and me were men and women from the Brunswick Naval Air Station, my Portland congressional and campaign offices, the office of Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, and the organization that has created this and many similar projects, Habitat for Humanity.

Community, economy, volunteers benefit, too

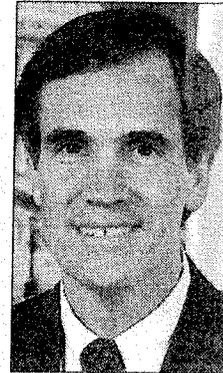
As we hammered away, I thought about the many individuals and groups that had come together to build this house.

The Bath-Brunswick affiliate of Habitat for Humanity had purchased the land along South Pleasant Street for six new homes, the largest Habitat subdivision in the state. Habitat supplied the plans and the site manager who kept us busy and safe that day. Marriner Lumber and the Merrymeeting Board of Realtors helped provide, respectively, the building materials and funds for plumbing, electrical and other specialized contractors.

Hundreds of people from Maine and around the country will give their time to hammer, saw, paint and otherwise help out. Donations of new, large appliances for this and all Habitat homes in the United

"We should restore and increase funding for successful federal housing programs and initiate new and creative ways to make decent housing available ..."

Rep. Tom Allen
D-Maine



States will come from Whirlpool. The Maine State Housing Authority provided a "forgivable loan" that will finance the building of the road, driveway and water and sewer infrastructure.

Other Habitat projects in Maine reflect different but similar collections of contributors. In Naples, South Portland, Falmouth and other Maine sites, it has taken an assortment of private charities, public institutions, businesses and individuals with time, energy and good will to build affordable homes for deserving families. Bill Beaugregard certainly fits that description. He works with severely disabled adults and children in Bath and has been a steadfast volunteer with Habitat for the last four years. His record of financial responsibility makes him a great prospect when the house is completed and sold to him, at cost, with a noninterest-bearing mortgage from Habitat. Like all prospective Habitat homeowners, Bill must commit at least 250 hours of "sweat equity" to building his home.

To provide a further incentive to homeowners to maintain the

house well, after he has been making mortgage payments for five years, he will also slowly get credit for any appreciation of the house's value.

The prospect of moving into his own home is nothing short of a "dream come true" for Bill. He says it is a "real blessing" to know that he will be able to have this place "to bring up my son."

Habitat for Humanity was formed in 1976 as a nonprofit, ecumenical ministry that seeks to eliminate substandard housing and homelessness from the world. Since then, Habitat has built more than 150,000 houses worldwide.

The involvement of former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, has helped publicize Habitat's good works and attract assistance from many quarters. The program recognizes that homeownership is good for the new owners, good for their communities, good for the national economy and good for those who volunteer. The teenagers, adults, businesses and organizations that lend a hand learn that they can make a difference and that a community is bound together by such acts.