

DIOCESAN NEWS

Penfield parishioners build house for family in city

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — After years of renting from various landlords, Linda Henderson, a 34-year-old single mother, said she could no longer take all the rules they laid down for her two children.

"They were always saying 'Your child can't do this,' and 'Your child can't play in the back yard,'" said Henderson, mother of Michael, 12, and Leisha, 4. "The best thing I figured was I needed my own back yard. You just can't lock kids up in the house."

Come this fall, Henderson will no longer fret about needing her own back yard. She will move into a three-bedroom home on Hoeltzer Street in the city built by parishioners from St. Joseph's Church in Penfield. Flower City Habitat for Humanity, Inc., is guiding them.

Flower City is the local affiliate of Habitat for Humanity, which has built or rehabilitated hundreds of homes for low-income families in 40 countries over the last decade. To be eligible for a home in greater Rochester, family income must not exceed 50 percent of the median family income for the Rochester metropolitan area, according to information from Habitat.

The families take out 15-year, interest-free mortgages on the homes. And they must contribute 500 hours of "sweat equity" to Habitat by working on their own house or someone else's, according to Steve Walsh, Habitat's site coordinator for the St. Joseph's project.

The St. Joseph's-sponsored home is one of six being built on Hoeltzer Street by Habitat, including one located a few houses down the street that is being built with the help of parishioners from St. Louis Church in Pittsford, according to Walsh.

Walsh also pointed out that the St. Joseph's project marks the first time a single church has both funded and built a home in the city. Generally, each Habitat home is funded by a variety of organizations and churches, and often is built by different groups cooperating with each



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Father Ed Steinkirchner, Carol Watkins, and George Kellogg pass bricks for the foundation of the Habitat for Humanity house being built on Hoeltzer Street by parishioners of Penfield's St. Joseph's Church. Watkins and her family volunteer time in hopes of owning a Habitat home.



Steve Zilora (right) shares his knowledge of bricklaying with Jerron Watkins.

type things and such activities can get their hands involved in this," he said.

As for Henderson, a Baptist, she had nothing but compliments for the Catholics building her new home.

"They are real nice people, lovely people, and well organized," she said.

Henderson, a medical technician at Rochester General Hospital, learned of the Habitat program through a friend whose home had been rehabilitated by the organization. She contacted Habitat in June 1995, and was approved for a home last September, she said.

She has already put in 400 hours of labor at another site as part of her sweat equity arrangement, she said, noting that she did everything from lay brick to sand and paint.

"I liked everything but the bricklaying," she said with a laugh.

About the same time Henderson got the go-ahead for a Habitat home, St. Joseph's Social Ministry Committee decided to promote bringing the whole parish together by building a Habitat home, according to Sister Switzer. She credited Social Ministry Committee member Ann Redding, who had worked with Habitat, with helping interest the parish in the project.

In the months following the committee's decision to go with Habitat, parishioners were surveyed for their interest, Sister Switzer said. Father Michael F. Conboy, then-pastor, preached about the project and wrote about it in the parish bulletin.

Following a January kick-off meeting, various project committees were set up in the meeting's aftermath, Sister Switzer said, including one on building materials donations, co-headed by Kevin Prinzing and Tim O'Connor. O'Connor, an industrial sales manager with Great Lakes Plumbing Supply, has buttonholed several local building suppliers for up to \$24,000 worth of donations. He noted he volunteered out of a sense of gratitude for the blessings in his own life.

"I felt it was a way to give back to the church and the Rochester community," he said.

other, he said.

More than 500 St. Joseph's parishioners — men, women and children — have volunteered on committees concentrating on such tasks as publicity, fundraising and building for the project, according to Sister Patricia Switzer, RSM, a pastoral associate at the parish.

A ground-breaking ceremony was held May 5, but bad weather delayed site excavation until June 20, Sister Switzer said. Construction is expected to be completed by October, she said.

The project's hands-on feeling has awakened the Catholic faith's call to works of charity among many of the parish's members, Sister Switzer added.

"We've got people coming out for this ... that weren't active in the parish," she said.

Henry Gaebel, a member of the Social Ministry Committee, agreed with Sister Switzer's statement. In particular, church members not attracted to traditional religious activities have found the project a meaningful way to express their faith, he commented.

"People not as comfortable with retreat-

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