

CORPORATE DONORS PARTNER WITH HABITAT FOR HUMANITY TO BUILD HOME

Visualizing a team of volunteers working together to build a home is the usual image that people have for Habitat for Humanity. What is often unknown is how much corporate sponsors and donors contribute toward Habitat for Humanity projects to help bring them to reality. One such example is a home building project recently completed in East Windsor. The owner of Mrs. G's retail appliance and TV superstore on Route 1 in Lawrence, Debbie Schaffer, arranged with Whirlpool to donate new kitchen and laundry appliances. The recipient of this new home was Sharon D'Alessio.

When you first meet Ms. D'Alessio, the new home owner, you will quickly learn that she has a couple of important passions in her life that have guided her life choices. She has been reaching out to and caring for children and animals for most of her adult life. During the past six years, for example, she has provided foster care for more than 28 children who had been abused, neglected or abandoned and has adopted two of them as her sons. She often found making ends meet to be challenging. Money was tight. Until recently, Ms. D'Alessio was living in a cramped apartment in Woodbridge, paying what she felt was a very high rent.

Never imagining that she would be chosen, but on the recommendation of a friend, Ms. D'Alessio applied to the Millstone Basin Affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International. The organization was about to begin its eighth new home project in this area since their formation in 1990 and were seeking applicants. The project would be sponsored by the Queenship of Mary Church in Plainsboro, where more than 300 members of the church and outside donors and volunteers would become involved.

There were many worthy candidates who were considered, so making the choice was difficult for the organizers to make. But choosing Sharon D'Alessio represented an opportunity for Habitat and the church to help someone who had been helping others in her community for many years. Habitat for Humanity International is a non-profit, ecumenical Christian ministry dedicated to eliminating substandard housing and homelessness worldwide. The Habitat Millstone Basin independent affiliate serves Cranbury, East Windsor, Hightstown, Plainsboro, Washington

Township and West Windsor. They were fortunate to have some donated land in East Windsor and a strong Plainsboro church with enthusiastic members sponsoring the project.

April of this year, the Habitat for Humanity team began excavating, grading, installing the foundation utilities and pouring a foundation slab in preparation for building Ms. D'Alessio's new home. Two volunteer architects, Bill Gittings and Ed Klimek had previously developed the plans. As the designated recipient of this home, Ms. D'Alessio agreed to commit more than 300 hours of her own time and labor as "sweat equity" during its construction. Members of the church and other volunteers, working alongside building construction professionals, pitched in to install the framing, roof trusses and complete all of the other details required to construct a modern, efficient home.

Whenever possible, Habitat for Humanity negotiated donations or discounts for building materials. All labor except for the roof installation was provided by volunteers. One of the most important and potentially costly areas where help was needed was with the home appliances. This was where Mrs. G's community-involved, third-generation, family-owned business owner enthusiastically stepped in to help. Debbie Schaeffer, who is the owner of Mrs. G's retail appliance and TV superstore, learned about Habitat for Humanity's need through one of her customers, Sharbell Development Corp., a Robbinsville-based developer and builder.

Ms. Schaffer immediately went to work using her many long-established appliance industry contacts. When she contacted Gus Colyar, Territory Manager for Whirlpool home appliances, she found a willing donor. Whirlpool, working through Mrs. G's, equipped Sharon D'Alessio's kitchen with a new gas range, microwave oven, refrigerator and dishwasher and also supplied a new clothes washer and dryer for her laundry room. Ms. D'Alessio commented that her neighbors are envious of her stylish new black kitchen appliances, which resist her children's fingerprints. Ms. Schaffer, whose mother and grandmother preceded her in the business, was continuing their more than 70-year family tradition of repaying the communities that have contributed to her company's longevity and success.

Linda Principe and Richard Johnson, with the Queenship of Mary Church, co-chaired and

coordinated the entire project. Ms. Principe is an interior decorator/designer, so she was able to help Ms. D'Alessio with her interior design and color choices. In September Ms. D'Alessio's new home was ready for occupancy and she and her two boys moved in. Her new home has enough room to provide a private bedroom for the foster children who are assigned to her. Although her home was not free, Habitat for Humanity, the church and its volunteers, and generous donors like Whirlpool and Mrs. G's, have enabled Ms. D'Alessio to own a decent, affordable home of her own, with reasonable monthly payments, where she and her children and the children under her foster care can live with dignity, security and comfort.