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Blitz build brings 3 more homes online

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*St. Tammany bureau*

Never mind that it was in the middle of blazing summer -- Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West and 75 volunteers had a fire going in Covington recently.

The fire was one of work and enthusiasm as they "Blitz Built" three homes in 10 days beginning June 18.

The houses, located on Hope Lane between West 26th and 27th streets, are part of Hope Village II, and are some of the latest efforts of HFHSTW to provide decent and affordable housing for residents.

The three Habitat partner families buying these homes -- Isis Brown, Catherine James, and Cynthia Lewis -- received the keys at the House Dedication Ceremony held on June 28. Five other partner families -- Myesha Anderson, Elizabeth and Viola Anderson, Ashanta Earlycutt, Chaveon Heidburg, and Rhonda Jones -- also received the keys to their completed homes at the dedication.

"Habitat homebuyers worked side by side with volunteers building their houses," said Wendy Schneider, HFHSTW Communications Coordinator.

The dedication was especially touching for Lewis, who had undergone surgery this summer and walked into her house for the first time on Saturday before the ceremony, Schneider said.

"Tears flowed down her cheeks when she opened the front door," Schneider said. "'Look at my house. This is a beautiful thing,' she said."

And the homebuilders who had worked with her son and her friends surprised her with a new wooden rocking chair signed by all the volunteers.

The blitz involved the completion of the houses starting from bare platforms.

"The only thing that wasn't finished was some of the interior, like the installation of a few appliances, and the landscaping. It was just too hot," Schneider said. "They'd get out at 6 in the morning to beat the heat, so it wasn't for lack of trying."

They are part of Blitz Home Builders, an international group of dedicated Habitat for Humanity

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volunteers that has participated in multiple Blitz Builds during the last 10 years. They hail from several states, including Washington, California and Georgia, and like other Habitat volunteers, come from all walks of life. Some used their vacation time to build, and worked some eight-hour days and some 10-hour days.

"And we had a great partner with the Salvation Army, who provided lunch every day," she said. "We started calling them the Dream Team because after lunch they just pitched in and started putting things together with us. They started helping us out a lot after Katrina. And they're not just out there flipping hot dogs and hamburgers, but good local cuisine, which is what a lot of out-of-towners are looking for when they come here."

Volunteers' time is worth about \$35,000 per house, Schneider said, which is why they can sell a Habitat home below the actual cost of construction.

The three blitz-built homes have three bedrooms and about 1150 square feet of living space. They are finished with front lawn landscaping, consisting of sod and a flower bed, Schneider said. Like other Habitat homes, they are simple and give families the opportunity to be homeowners with no-profit, zero-interest mortgages.

HFHSTW is an ecumenical Christian ministry dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. Since its founding in 1981, as the 10th Habitat affiliate in the United States and the first in Louisiana, more than 100 repairs, 17 major home renovations and 140 new construction projects have been completed.

HFHSTW usually has one blitz build a year -- "Women Build" -- but this year, Schneider said, "has been exceptional. We've had three blitz builds."

This type of rapid construction has great benefit, Schneider said.

"Blitz Builds offer volunteers an exciting experience to meet a visible goal in a short time. For people who thrive on tight deadlines, the blitz build is a great adrenaline rush."

Anyone interested in volunteering with or donating to HFHSTW can call 893-3172 or go online to [www.habitatstw.org](http://www.habitatstw.org) for information.

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