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Clock's running on Habitat project ...



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ROCKFORD — Tenika Posley's living arrangements have been anything but spacious.

She and her three children were four of 10 people who shared a three-bedroom, one-bathroom house on the west side.

In the next week, she and dozens of volunteers from across the country will build a four-bedroom house for her from the ground up.

Posley will own **one of two houses in the 2300 block of Belden Street** that will go from foundation to completion by June 26 in the Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity/Blitz Home Builders project. That's two residences in eight working days, with builders resting on Sunday.

"It's exciting and overwhelming," said Michelle Hertzner, a single mother of two who will own the other house, a three-bedroom, one bath. "People working together, that's the beauty of this."

About 80 volunteers were on scene Thursday, helping build or serve food and refreshments. More are welcome to volunteer, and more are expected throughout the week, said Tonya Thayer, executive director of Rockford Habitat. The agency expects to dedicate the houses at **2334 and 2338 Belden St.** at 9 a.m. June 27.

"Having all the materials on site when we need them, having the volunteers here and the families prepared, it's been a huge undertaking," Thayer said. "It's been wonderful, but it certainly is a lot of work."

Volunteers came from Massachusetts, Arizona, California, across the Rock River Valley and elsewhere to build two of the seven houses Rockford Habitat will construct this year.

"When you show up, there's a slab, a pile of lumber, a bunch of people and a bunch of materials, and at the end of the week you have a finished home," said Glen Forthun, who came from Phoenix. "It's a real visual, tangible sense of accomplishment."

Forthun has been traveling for volunteer building projects since 1996, when he was in Hungary building 10 homes in a week as part of a project with former President Jimmy Carter.

Roy Zaborowski is chairman of Blitz Home Builders, a group of Habitat volunteers that has participated in fast-paced building projects since 1996. Zaborowski stands out from the crowd: He's 6-foot-4, has a gray beard and, most recognizably, wears the black kilt on the job. It's something he says started as a joke but has continued in a strange tradition. Volunteering to build gives him a sense of pride.

"Now I can drive around the country and say 'I built that house, I built that house, I built that house,'" he said.

Rockford Habitat has five other houses going up this year, but they're being built at a much less aggressive pace. The timeline there is five months, with plans to conclude by mid-September, Thayer said.

Habitat's mission is to provide affordable housing for people who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford a home of their own. The average income of Rockford Habitat homeowners last year was \$28,500.

"These are families who make too much for public assistance but not enough to qualify for a conventional loan," Thayer said. The mortgage payment is 25 percent of the monthly income.

Posley and Hertzner were chosen from 75 people who applied for the housing. Applicants are selected based on criteria including annual income, credit score and need.

"Being a single mom and raising two kids, I thought I would always rent," said Hertzner, a bus driver for the Rockford School District and a certified nursing assistant. "I've always gone out there and tried and looked, and the prices would get me down. I can't afford it."

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Hertzner and Posley will pay cost for their homes, estimated at \$57,000 apiece, Thayer said. Mortgages range from 18 to 31 years.

Rockford Habitat has worked with 77 families to built homes since 1988 and has 44 houses in the neighborhood where Hertzner and Posley will live.

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How to get involved

To volunteer for the Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity, register at the construction site on Belden Street or call 815-636-4573. For information on Blitz Home Builders, visit blitzhomebuilders.org.

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