

For Habitat, a 'hands-on investment'

Volunteers gather in Sandtown for annual summer building week

By Lynn Anderson
Sun reporter

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A paintbrush in her hand, Winifred Wilson prepared to add another coat of cream-colored paint to the door before her. As brush met wood, she recalled how her family once turned an apartment building into a single-family home.

"I'm one of 10 kids," said Wilson, who today is deputy secretary of programs for the Maryland Department of Human Resources. "My father knocked down the walls and then we painted the whole house," she recalled as she worked on the door, which will be hung in a West Baltimore rowhouse completely renovated by volunteers.

Wilson was one of 150 DHR employees who traded business suits and BlackBerries for T-shirts and screwdrivers yesterday as part of Sandtown Habitat for Humanity's 16th Annual Summer Building Week.



Volunteers from area churches and other businesses also donated their time to create new homes for area residents and their families.

DHR employees have been helping out in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood for eight years, said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald, who was appointed earlier this year and participated in her first volunteer day yesterday.

"Today we've had some time for some hands-on investment," Donald said during a brief break in work. "And it has been very gratifying."

Donald, Wilson and other DHR employees worked on two houses, the keys for which will be handed over to two single fathers and their children at a ceremony today. The men had to give 430 hours of "sweat equity" to qualify for the Habitat program and come up with a down payment equal to 2 percent of the total cost of the houses, which average \$60,000 each.

Residents who receive Habitat houses have 20 years to pay off their zero-percent mortgages, said Allan Tibbels, co-executive director of the Sandtown Habitat for Humanity, which is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International.

Tibbels and his wife, Susan, moved to the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood in 1986 to start the Habitat program. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, visited the area in 1992 for the first Summer Building Week. So far, the group has renovated 225 houses, some of which are painted in pastel shades that are noticeable from several blocks away.

"One of our greatest partners has been DHR," said Tibbels yesterday. "It's been a real honor to have them here for so long."



Donald and other DHR volunteers also met with Valerie and Morris Boddie, 32 and 37 respectively, who were just beginning the process of renovating their three-story rowhouse yesterday. The couple, who have three children, ages 7 to 16, have a lot of work ahead of them. Today their house is not much more than a brick shell decorated with shreds of outdated wallpaper.

"I'm wondering what we got ourselves into," said Morris Boddie, staring at the brick walls and wallpaper, some of it covered in velvet or busts of naked women.

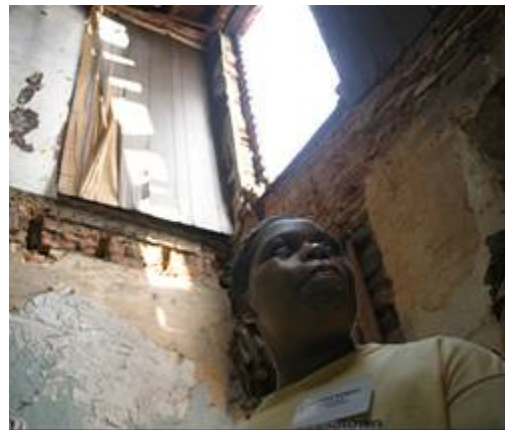
"But we were so excited to finally be getting a house that when we saw this one we just said, 'We'll take it,'" said Morris Boddie, a former warehouse worker who is on medical disability. His wife works as a housekeeper at Coppin State University.

Valerie Boddie grew up in Sandtown-Winchester, where the median household income is \$15,000 a year, and said she is excited about returning to the community where her father still lives.

Peeking up from the basement through brand-new floor joists, Valerie Boddie's father, who is also helping with the renovation, said he was proud of his daughter and excited about having her nearby.

"After all of this work I'm doing, I get a key," exclaimed 50-year-old Marshall Thompson.

Said Valerie Boddie of her father: "He can come over whenever he wants."



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