

Families move into Habitat for Humanity homes

By Bill Rea

It was a very special day Tuesday for Caledon's newest residents.

Four families were handed the keys to their new Southfields Village homes, courtesy Habitat for Humanity.

"What a great day to celebrate home ownership," declared Thomas Fischer, vice-president of gift-in-kind donations for Habitat for Humanity GTA.

There were several dignitaries and Habitat officials on hand for the home dedication ceremony, and they were braving the first real winter blast of the season in the area.

Habitat partners with low-income, working families who are in need of safe and affordable houses which they can call home. The people who will be moving into the 10 Southfields homes have contributed to their construction. Fischer said that has included at least 500 hours of "sweat equity" in helping with the building of their own homes, as well as those of others and helping at Habitat ReStores.

These families make zero-interest mortgage payments that are capped at 30 per cent of their household income. This arrangement helps remove the barriers of home ownership, enabling them to move on to better lives.

"These families have worked so hard," Fischer remarked to the audience. "It's great to be able to celebrate this success with you."

Fischer praised the involvement of the Town of Caledon in the project, noting the Town waved the normal development charges for these homes. He also commented on the contribution of Peel Region and its commitment to affordable housing.

"With a shortage of affordable housing options across the GTA, we're proud to provide affordable homeownership to families in the Town of Caledon for the first time in Habitat for Humanity's history," Fischer stated.

Habitat for Humanity GTA Chair Dennis Moir also expressed appreciation to the Town and Region for their partnership, as well as for the work of the families.

"Welcome to Caledon," an enthusiastic Mayor Allan Thompson told the new residents. "Cold or not, we have warm hearts."

"I am extremely proud to officially welcome our newest members of the community to our town," Thompson added. "This project further demonstrates the success of the Habitat for Humanity program, and I look forward to further partnering with Habitat on future Caledon initiatives."

He added there will be future such initiatives in Bolton area developments.

Thompson stressed that affordable housing provides hope.

"Everybody's entitled to have a home they can call home," he added.

He also pointed out these new residents will help add to the local volunteer base, which he said makes communities great.

"This is what community giving back is all about," he observed.

"This is a great day for us," declared Build Site Supervisor Dorino Gravina, as he praised the partnerships that led to the development, including with the contractors and trades people, and people who came out all the time. "These are the great people who actually got the stuff done."

The new residents are grateful for their new homes.

"You helped make our family's dream of home ownership possible," Dionne Lucien told those assembled.

A single mother with three daughters, she said she's experienced some rough times over the years.

"Sometimes life happens," she said, describing how she tried to get through the burdens of being a single mom while trying to establish a career in advertising. She was living in the basement of her parent's house, but that all changed when her folks sold their home. Needing a three-bedroom apartment to rent, she found she couldn't afford one in the GTA.

She found herself living with her sister in overcrowded conditions in a Brampton neighbourhood that wasn't very safe.

Lucien said she heard about Habitat for Humanity, but had likened being selected to winning the lottery. But she also decided she had nothing to lose. "You have to be in it to win it," she concluded.

She recalled attending her second interview in July with apprehension, but she arrived to find Thompson there, and she proceeded to get "the best news I think I had ever heard in my whole life."

"With a lot of persistence, things can change," she added.

"I just can't wait to see how life will happen for us next," she declared.

"You never gave up hope," Thompson said to Lucien.

"It means so much to finally have a home of our own, something I can pass down to my children," she said. "My daughters are excited to start painting and decorating their rooms, something they could never do before."



Mayor Allan Thompson joined Dionne Lucien and her daughters Angelina, Selena and Bonita as they prepare to move into their new home.