

Habitat for Humanity bringing new residents

By Bill Rea

SouthFields Village is a growing community, and it's population is soon to include some families who have been given a hand up. Habitat for Humanity held a ceremony last Thursday to proclaim the first build project in Caledon.

"To all the new families, welcome to Caledon," Mayor Allan Thompson announced.

"You're going to love it here, and I'm glad you're part of it."

The project on Kennedy Road will provide decent and affordable housing for 10 working, low-income families, helping them get out of the rental market and into the world of home ownership.

"Today, we celebrate a new beginning for 10 families," observed Thomas Fischer, vice-president of regional development for Habitat GTA.

He said construction has started on four of the units, and work on the other six should commence this month. The plan is to have eight of them occupied by the end of the year.

"What a life-changing moment it will be for these families," he declared.

Fischer also expressed thanks to the donors and other partners in the project.

"It takes a number of individuals to come together to make this a reality," he observed.

He also had praise for former Caledon mayor Marolyn Morrison, who was on hand for the ceremony, for her vision that made the project possible.

Fischer pointed out these units will provide more than just shelter. He said they will transform lives and make for a stronger community.

"With an extreme shortage of affordable housing options across the GTA, it's important for us to start building in Caledon," Fischer observed. "I have had the personal pleasure of notifying a few of the families that will be moving in, and hearing what having a decent, affordable place to call home and raise their children means to them."

"It's truly inspiring," he added. "We are fortunate to have amazing partners like the Region of Peel, the Town of Caledon, corporate and individuals from the community who support us in various ways, but there is still much more support needed."

Rev. Lloyd Paul of Mayfield United Church delivered the Devotion, and he too commented on the short supply of affordable housing in Caledon.

"It's good news that Habitat for Humanity is building houses," he remarked.

He also spoke about his reading of St. Francis of Assisi, who he said decided to live his life focused on alleviating the needs and suffering of others, instead of self advancement.

Paul also praised other agencies in the community that have been helping with the effort, such as Caledon Community Services, Family Transition Place, Bethell Hospice, etc.

Sue VanDeVelde-Coke, CEO of Kerry's Place Autism Services and a member of the Habitat for Humanity GTA board for three weeks, pointed out she's in the health-care field, stressing that proper housing is part of that. She said it enables children to go to school, while allowing families to contribute to the community.

"The need is just terrific," she declared.

Thompson commented that the greatest thing Caledon is proud of is the spirit of giving back, which means getting involved.

He referred back to the days when Morrison was on Town council, before she became mayor, when they were working on what they wanted the town to look like in the future.

"It's a team approach," he said, adding Habitat for Humanity is a great way to make affordable housing happen, with help from the faith-based community, trades, banks, etc.

Thompson also praised Tom Baskerville, vice-president of development with Coscorp (one of the area developers), for his involvement in the project.

"You can't help but get emotional," commented Paula Tenuta, who was representing the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), as she reflected that these families will be living in homes built with added purpose and love.

TD Bank is one of the sponsors of the program, and local branch Manager Marissa Kennedy thanked Habitat for its enthusiasm in bringing various groups together. She pointed out many TD staff members volunteer with the agency, and she said the true reward is knowing that deserving families get homes because of it.

The ceremony also heard from Wafaa Talha, who's husband and three children will soon be moving into one of the units.

"We are looking forward to moving into our new home," she said, adding they have invested years and money renting substandard

accommodations. This new home will enable them to start investing in their children's future. "We are very excited and looking forward to the day we move in."

Brampton resident Saggar Jalal, who will be moving into one of the units with his wife and two daughters, said he's expecting to make some contribution to the construction project, although he hadn't yet been told what it will be. What ever it is, he said, "I'll do it."

Habitat for Humanity runs ReStores, and Jalal said he and his wife work there.

He said his wife learned on the program while taking classes in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). They applied and eventually learned they had been accepted.

"That was a really terrific moment for me," he said. "To be a homeowner, I feel proud of myself."

Habitat for Humanity GTA is a non-profit housing organization working with communities to build homes for local families in need of affordable housing. By offering zero down-payment, no-interest mortgages capped at 30 per cent of the family's income, it empowers families to achieve stability and self-reliance.



Mayor Allan Thompson assisted Wafaa Talha in cutting the ribbon on Habitat for Humanity's first build project in Caledon, accompanied by former mayor Marolyn Morrison; Habitat for Humanity GTA Board Member Sue VanDeVelde-Coke; Paula Tenuta of BILD; Marissa Kennedy of TD Bank; Councillors Gord McClure and Doug Beffort; Thomas Fischer, vice-president of regional development for Habitat GTA; Tom Baskerville, vice-president of development with Coscorp; Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones; Councillor Johanna Downey; and Rev. Lloyd Paul. Photo by Bill Rea



People attending last Thursday's ceremony celebrated the occasion with a group fist-pump.



These families are looking forward to moving into their homes.