

CAMBODIA: Sisters team built each wall block by block

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we arrived allowed us to start building walls. We transferred blocks from stacks to the worksite, applied mortar and built each wall block by block, leveled, added mortar, added a block until the row was complete. We mixed mortar by hauling buckets of sand and water, added a bag of cement and stirred the thick sludge with shovels. We filled mortar buckets and repeated this process hour after hour, day after day.

Finished houses measure approximately 356 square feet, about the size of a single-car garage, and include a flush toilet. Families and extended families with up to eight members will occupy these homes built on land secured through collaboration between the Cambodian government and Habitat Cambodia. Though each family has their own story, similarities exist. Most were squatting on land that did not belong to them. Many homes were unstable structures of tin and boards that would flood during the rainy season, causing unsanitary conditions. Income levels vary but most get by on a few U.S. dollars per day.

The 23 families occupying these newly constructed homes will now have a safe and secure place to live and will own their homes thanks to the work of volunteers and

successful funding by Habitat Cambodia.

Building in another country is demanding yet rewarding work. Participant Sally Benton described the experience this way:

“Taking part in a big build is a remarkable experience allowing one to engage with a culture that is so different from our own and provides the opportunity to give back to our global community by providing much-needed housing.”

Though we worked hard during the day, evenings provided a mix of opportunities to try out the cuisine of the area or participate in group dinners and activities. On our final night, the Battambang Circus treated us to a performance. The show included a range of

circus acrobatics, juggling, and clowning, dramatic and visual art retelling the Khmer Rouge story. The performers were coaches and trainers for the arts school, Phare Ponleu Selpak. The NGO helps disadvantaged young people escape from situations connected with poverty such as begging or trafficking to get an education, in public school and in the arts. We all agreed the performance was world-class.

This is the fifth overseas build led by Sisters Habitat board member Jack McDonnell and his wife, MaryAnne. One previous build was in Nepal, three in Kyrgyzstan.

Asked why they devote so much time to Habitat for Humanity, MaryAnne replied, “We believe assisting



PHOTO BY GARY MILLER

Eighty-eight-year-old Pom Ki does not complain about her leaky thatch and wood house but is excited to have a new comfortable home. She is nearly deaf but speaks at least four languages: Khmer, English, French and Thai. She keeps a whiteboard in her home to communicate using the written word.

people in other countries to is how we can help to create have a decent place to live world peace.”

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AMERICAN TRINITY: Jefferson, Custer, and the Spirit of the West Local historian Larry Peterson will be presenting his award-winning book focusing on influences, factors and forces that culminated in the collision of European and Native American civilizations. Written in a scholarly style, yet easily accessible, American Trinity emphasizes the tragic history of American Indians, while connecting their treatment to other cultures in prior centuries such as the Jews, enslaved Africans, and beleaguered Christians. Peterson says, “Shining the light on all the dark corners of American history is painful.” However, he points out that deeper understanding of our national history and human nature allows us to have a better understanding of our future. This should be a very enlightening as well as informative evening. Jim Cornelius will also be joining us this evening.

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