



HOUSING *Special Edition*

EMPOWERED

by Home Construction

Women learn skills, teamwork and help community

BY KATHERINE KOVACICH
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Building a house isn't just a man's job anymore. For the women involved in Women Build, transforming wood and concrete into a beautiful home isn't as difficult as they were told it would be, although it did take a lot of hard work.

Women Build is a division of Willamette West Habitat for Humanity. The group completed their first house this January. Nation-

wide, the program empowers women to learn construction skills, lead teams, and work to provide much-needed affordable housing in their communities.

"There were women of all ages, physical abilities, background, you name it," said Cherry Williams, a building committee member. "They all just loved feeling empowered and to work to try a new skill in a non-threatening, non-intimidating setting. They felt a sense of accomplish-

ment. Several were recent divorcees or had been through some horrendous situation in their home life and took on this project to get out and make a change in their life and they just loved it. They grow."

Through training and materials provided by Lowe's, the women involved learned about the intricacies of starting from the foundation up. Lowe's sponsored 21 Women Build homes across the nation in 2004, and is sponsoring an

additional 22 homes in 2005.

"These are skills that women have traditionally been excluded from," Williams said. "They weren't invited to these skills growing up. They're taking a step in trying something they've wanted to try for a long time but never felt that they had the opportunity. They felt less than capable because they didn't have the skills."

In addition to the skills learned, women can feel a sense of empowerment through volunteer work.

"They're helping people that are less fortunate than they are," Williams said. "They feel like they're giving something back even when they may not feel they have something to give."



All hands are needed when the walls go up on a local Women Build project that adds much-needed affordable housing to the community.



Women of all ages and abilities feel empowered during the construction of a home.

The house completed earlier this year went to the lucky Spyker family.

St. John said that a family is selected according to need and whether they have a stable income to support a mortgage program. The homes built in Women Build are purchased by the resident with a no-profit loan and zero interest rate. A four-bedroom home would cost about \$450 a month.

In addition, every family who gets a home has to put in 500 hours of "sweat equity" by building homes.

"It's amazing. Think of if you've been living in poor, rental housing with poor conditions, then to move into a newly constructed well built

home," Williams said. "This is sometimes the first time kids have had their own rooms."

Because of proper insulation, utility costs families may have struggled with before also go down.

"Quite a few of our homeowners have never owned a home before, dealing with issues on home maintenance and budgeting," Williams said. "From being on the jobsite and having worked along side of the future homeowners, typically these are families that are very hard working. They've all had jobs, they have kids and have been in living situations that were way below standard. They take a lot of pride in their new home, it's so much better than the situations they were in before."

Women can also take the knowledge they have with this project and apply it to their own lives, be it a plumbing issue to fixing a window to tiling a floor.

"So many women want to give and help their community and they think that they're stuck in certain patterns," said volunteer Melanie St. John. "Women build had over 350 new volunteers to Habitat just for women build. We don't discriminate against men, but it was women who literally built the house."

Women Build will begin work on their 2005 project in May of this year. Anyone interested in being involved can call 503-844-7606 or email info@wwfh.org.

Program Brings Homeowner Success

Option easier when priced out of market

Portland Community Land Trust provides a unique way for hard working families to purchase a home.

The nonprofit, democratically run community organization buys and holds land permanently, so market factors that cause prices to rise are kept down. The homes on PCLT's land are then sold to homebuyers with limited incomes at below market prices, because the cost of the land is not part of the equation.

In exchange for buying their homes at a price they can afford, a land trust homeowner agrees to limit the price at which the home is resold. PCLT homeowners also agree to resell their homes to other households with limited incomes, thus keeping the house permanently affordable for future generations.

Land trust homeowners benefit from stability, security and the opportunity to build equity, while agreeing to maintain the homes affordable price for the next buyer.

Portland Community Land Trust



A new home becomes the property of its owner while the land stays in trust to keep the purchase price low and available for future working families.

works with first time homebuyers at or below 80 percent of the area median income, adjusted for household size. For a family of four in Portland that is a maximum of \$54,300 annually.

If your family meets these criteria then you may be able to become a homeowner through PCLT. The first step is to attend a free orientation. Upcoming sessions will be held on Thursday, April 7 from 6:30

to 7:30 p.m. at PCLT, 3109B N.E. Broadway, and on Tuesday, April 19 from 6:30 to 7:30 at the Kenton Fire Station, 8105 N. Brandon. There will also be an open house on April 3 from 1 to 4 p.m. at 6817 N. Seneca for the organization's new construction town homes in St. Johns. Area residents are invited to come see what PCLT has to offer. For more information, call 503-493-0293.

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- Quality homes at affordable prices (income qualifications apply)
- Shared appreciation that ensures affordability for the next buyer
- Support through the home buying process



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