

# Habitat homeowners pay off the note

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Free and clear — it's the goal of anyone working to pay off a mortgage, and for one Cottage Grove couple, the goal became a reality late last month.

On Saturday, July 25, current and former board members with Cottage Grove Area Habitat for Humanity joined James LeVar and Corinne Simonsen, the owners of the eighth house built by Habitat in this community, for a mortgage-burning ceremony to celebrate the paying-off of their debt on their 16th Street home. LeVar and Simonsen became the first Habitat homeowners to own their home "free and clear" after paying off the balance of their mortgage earlier this year.

Also present at the ceremony was Sunny Kennedy, president of the Habitat board during the time of James' and Corinne's selection process and house building, and Stephen Kneller, the Eugene-based general contractor who served as the general contractor for the construction of the home back in 2005.

Habitat Executive Director Linda Oxley said the couple's ownership of the home is part of "the ongoing vision of Habitat for Humanity to provide a 'hand up' not a 'hand out' to families to own their own simple and decent home."

LeVar was first informed by letter that he had been selected to partner with Habitat to build his three-bedroom home in 2000, and in the ensuing years, Oxley said he volunteered more than 500 hours of "sweat equity" toward building the home himself. The home was the first built by



courtesy photo

**James LeVar of Cottage Grove burns the promissory note for the mortgage on his home, the eighth planned and built by Cottage Grove Area Habitat for Humanity.**

Habitat to be entirely accessible and customized to the needs of its owner, LeVar, a paraplegic who lost his legs in a car crash in southern California before moving to Oregon. Of LeVar, Oxley said, he "has a wonderful spirit and is a hard worker in everything he does."

"James and Corinne proudly maintain their home and beautiful yard and gardens, having been selected at least twice in the last several years, as 'Yard of the Week' by the Sentinel," she wrote.

"Habitat gave James a great opportunity," said Simonsen, who stated that a former Habitat board

member who has since passed on, Camy Walters, was instrumental in LeVar's selection.

"The experience was quite wonderful," she said. "Unfortunately, we've since lost some terrific people that were instrumental and great to work with."

Simonsen said the couple decided early on to get right to work paying off their debt.

"We decided from the get-go that these homes are interest-free, but they're not free," she said. "So we started doubling down on the house payments to return that money to Habitat so they could go forward building other homes."

# Fire District exploring bond for new equipment

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

South Lane County Fire and Rescue came into being when the Cottage Grove and Creswell fire departments merged in 2003. The District's equipment, however, is older than the District itself.

South Lane Chief John Wooten said that the District's "entire fleet is aged out," and a committee has been formed to explore the option of a bond levy to replace it.

"There's been no new equipment purchased since the formation of the District," Wooten said. "The only new equipment is a new engine at the Creswell station that was an insurance replacement when the old one burned up."

Wooten said that continuing to use aged equipment may affect the District's ISO rating, which helps determine insurance rates for residents in

the District. A lower rating may correspond to higher rates.

The District is looking to replace five pieces of equipment — two fire engines, an aerial and two tenders, Wooten said.

"The engines age out every 25 years, but the guidelines from the National Fire Protection Agency say that they should not be in front-line service for over 15 years," he said. "When you try to comply with those guidelines, it puts you in a different place financially. These days, just one engine costs \$400,000, and an aerial is about \$1 million."

Newer equipment, Wooten said, features options such as passenger restraints and collision avoidance features not found on older apparatus.

"The amenities, I'm not interested in," he said. "The biggest risk I see is if our gear doesn't have



photo by Sam Wright

**Officials with South Lane County Fire and Rescue say their equipment pre-dates the founding of the District in 2003.**

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# First-ever Emergency Preparedness Fair happens Saturday

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Cottage Grove is set to host its first Emergency Preparedness Fair this Saturday, Aug. 15, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., a fair that will take place at the helipad at PeaceHealth Cottage Grove Community Medical Center.

Last month's Independence Day earthquake centered near Waltherville paired with an eye-opening article from the "New Yorker" magazine about the possibility of a high-magnitude quake from the Cascadia Subduction Zone to put disaster preparedness in the Pacific Northwest spotlight.

City leaders, though, say they've been working on disaster preparedness scenarios for some time, and they plan to introduce the final draft of their new Emergency Operations Plan to the City Council this fall, according to City Planner Amanda Ferguson.

First, though, comes the fair, which will take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and include demonstrations and interactive displays with many of the agencies and organizations that will respond to an emergency in southern Lane County.

"This family-friendly event will have lots of hands-on, fun, educational activities that teach you how to ensure your family is prepared for the worst," according to a recent press release. "Activities will include: prizes and games, helicopter and fire truck displays, hands-on fire extinguisher training, a disaster obstacle course (for all ages), a disaster wheel, Sparky the Fire Dog, an electrical safety panel and more.

Partners for the event include: Life Flight, South Lane County Fire and Rescue District, Lane County Emergency Management, Cottage Grove Community Development and Emergency Management, Cottage Grove Community Hospital, PeaceHealth Medical Services, Lane County Public Health, Pacific Power, EPUD, StoveTec, NW Natural and the Oregon National Guard.

According to a trailer developed by the City to promote the event, the fair will include a natural disaster obstacle course and decontamination booth. LifeFlight will also offer a look at one of its helicopters. Activities for many of the event's partners will take place in an air-conditioned tent. A raffle will be held for a 72-hour disaster preparedness kit, and a "disaster wheel" meant to test locals' knowledge of natural disasters will also be available. The trailer video is available on Youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm8swt3S4Xg&feature=youtu.be>.



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