



Since 1985, Habitat for Humanity Canada and its partners have helped build homes for 1,800 working, low-income families. PHOTO: HABITAT FOR HUMANITY CANADA

Today is World Habitat Day

The need is great, the goal straight forward: Provide working, low-income families with the foundations on which to build a healthy future for themselves – a safe, affordable home. Thanks to the efforts of a concerned organization, and its dedicated corporate sponsors and volunteers, the job is getting done one house at a time across Canada.

Habitat for Humanity

Today – the UN's designated World Habitat Day – Habitat for Humanity Canada (HFHC) will join Habitat for Humanity around the world to raise its voice in emphasis of the importance of simple, decent, affordable housing.

This continues a tradition started 25 years ago in Winkler, Manitoba, when Habitat built its first home for a Canadian family. In so doing, it launched a program that now spans 10

provinces and two territories, and draws 50,000 volunteers a year. Habitat for Humanity Canada, with 73 affiliates across the country, has so far helped 1,800 working Canadian families buy simple, safe, sound homes.

"We aren't about housing per se, but we are in the business of transforming the lives of our partner families," says Stewart Hardacre, president and newly appointed chief executive officer, HFHC.

"Knowing the effects on partner families and their children down the road in being healthier, happier and better economically is really where the magic happens," says Mr. Hardacre.

The Habitat promise is simple: build decent, affordable homes using volunteer labour, donated materials and interest-free mortgages for working, low-income families.

Then watch the newly-housed families become involved in the community, enjoy better health and improved education, pay taxes and get better jobs. Decent housing, Habitat insiders believe, is a basic human right that breaks the cycle of poverty.

Habitat's worldwide growth serves as a testament to this philosophy. The international organization is now active in 93 countries and has built over 350,000 houses.

In vibrancy and the commitment of its volunteers and sup-

about...



Founded in 1985, Habitat for Humanity Canada is a national, non-profit organization. With over 50,000 volunteers yearly and 73 affiliate organizations across Canada, its mission is to break the cycle of poverty by providing access to affordable home ownership.

Habitat homes are a hand up, not a handout. In addition to taking on a geared-to-income, no-interest, no down payment mortgage, families dedicate 500 volunteer hours each to fulfill Habitat's "sweat equity" requirement.

"Our families make [mortgage] payments based on 25 per cent of their income, and do sweat equity," says Susan Zamborini, executive director of Habitat for Humanity PEI. "We help hard-working families build equity in a house and improve their financial standing later in life."

Habitat homeowner Phil Fabroni says, "It's pretty phenomenal to have had a hand in building our own house."

porters seem unstoppable. In Canada, by the end of 2010, Habitat will build almost 500 homes nationally and internationally, Mr. Hardacre says.

Why internationally? "The problem of sub-standard housing is a global phenomenon that requires a global solution by working locally in as many countries as possible," says Randall Sack, director, International Programs, HFHC. "As part of our program, we attempt to build one house internationally for each house built domestically."

Studies show that 81 per cent of Canadians see the lack of affordable housing in their own communities as a problem, and 88 per cent believe it is a growing issue.

The list of associated ills could fill a book. Over three million Canadians are living in sub-standard housing, and 1.3 million households cannot afford to pay for both shelter and other life necessities such food, child-care or utilities.

"Participating communities get behind the project when they understand it is a hard-working, low-income family needing a hand up and not a handout," says Mr. Hardacre.

"Many of the donated building supplies and volunteers are from the local community."

But Habitat still needs financial donations and government support. "We are competing with private developers for land, so

milestones...



1,800 Canadian families living in safe, decent, affordable housing. Meaningful benchmarks include:

1985 – First Habitat home is built on Canadian soil in Winkler, Manitoba

1991 – World's first ReStore is opened by Habitat for Humanity Winnipeg

2000 – The first Women Build is hosted by Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region

2001 – Habitat celebrates its 500th home, which was built in London, Ontario

2003 – The first-ever royal visit to a Habitat build site by Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex

Habitat for Humanity Canada is celebrating some very special numbers this year: 25 years; 10 million volunteer hours; almost

2005 – The Global Village program is launched in Canada

2006 – Student Build is launched

2006 – Canada's first Energy-Star certified Habitat home is built by HFH Wellington County

2009 – ReNew IT test program is launched by Habitat for Humanity Halton, helping repair and renovate existing housing

2010 – Habitat for Humanity Canada celebrates its 25th anniversary with 73 affiliates

we need more financial resources for that," says Mr. Hardacre. "More supportive government policies would also help us to ensure we can build more homes and serve more families in need."

Less Lalonde, vice-president of National Partnerships and Giving Programs with HFHC, labels housing as a gateway issue.

"When you invest in affordable housing, it leads to improved health, education and economic opportunities for families at risk. It lessens the financial burden on society in areas like social services and health care. It's not a hand-out solution – it's about making a long-term investment that has significant merit to Canadians."

The premise is simple: Decent housing breaks the cycle of poverty. The answer: Build decent, affordable homes using volunteer labour, donated materials and interest-free mortgages for working low-income families. Then watch the newly-housed families become involved in the community, enjoy better health and improved education, pay taxes and get better jobs.