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Habitat nears homes goal

MATT BATCHELDOR; The Olympian

OLYMPIA – South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a \$25,000 fundraising push to complete its 15-home development on Olympia's east side.

Seven homes are finished in the Fairview Cottage development, at 1800 Fairview St. N.E. Four more are under construction, set to be completed this summer. The Raise the Roof fundraiser, which runs through May 22, will help fund the final four homes, which are expected to be finished in summer 2010, development director Susan Newman said.

Newman said it's the first time the organization has held a fundraiser of this type.

Besides accepting donations, volunteers are holding fundraisers, such as a pizza party, a car wash and a lemonade sale.

Habitat is an ecumenical Christian, nonprofit organization that builds homes for low-income people. Picking the residents for homes is a highly selective process that includes checks of references, credit and criminal history, as well as two home visits.

One of the four homes going up now will soon become the residence of Jeanette Ross.

Ross, a 36-year-old massage therapist, lives in a two-bedroom apartment with an 8-year-old son and a 3-year-old foster son.

She said she's thrilled at the prospect of having her first home.

"By people providing a home for us, we're able to provide a home for someone else," she said.

Ross describes the process of getting the home as "exciting and overwhelming" and said it makes her feel as though she's in a movie.

"It's been an amazing trip," she said.

Ross, like all Habitat homeowners, had to put in 500 hours of "sweat equity," which means helping build houses for Habitat. Homeowners often join volunteers on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the main building days at the Fairview subdivision. They also have to attend homeowner classes with subjects such as dispute resolution and finance.

Homeowners pay their mortgages to Habitat, and if they sell the home before living in it for 20 years, a percentage of the equity goes back to Habitat.

When the four homes under construction are finished, the local Habitat chapter will have built 38 homes, executive director, Curt Andino said. The organization has a goal of four homes a year and is looking for land for its next development.

“The last thing we ever want to do is stop building,” he said.