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More Olympia dreams realized

MATT BATCHELDOR; The Olympian

OLYMPIA – Four families received the keys to their new Habitat for Humanity homes Saturday as the nonprofit agency's development on the city's east side came closer to completion.

"What we are doing here today is easily the most important day of the year for us," said Curt Andino, executive director of South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity.

The development in the 1800 block of Fairview Street Northeast now has 11 homes. It has four more to go until Fairview Cottages is complete; Andino expects that to happen next summer. He added that the local Habitat chapter is acquiring land in Tumwater for another development.

Those homes don't come easy. Each person who qualifies for a habitat home must put in 500 hours of "sweat equity" building homes for Habitat. They're joined by an assortment of volunteers and people who supply food for the workers and building materials and other in-kind donations.

Four families got the new two- or three-bedroom houses, three of them with single mothers – Lisa Metcalf, Liz McAllister and Jeanette Ross. Mohamed and Mariam Sahli and their family, recent immigrants from Libya, were the other recipients. Information about them came from the day's program.

The new homeowners expressed their gratitude, often tearfully, as invited dignitaries presented them with the keys to their new homes.

Col. Lois C. Beard of the 593rd Sustainment Brigade at Fort Lewis was on hand to present the key to Metcalf. The Army has provided volunteers for the project. She said soldiers especially value the concept of home because they're away so often.

"I think this particular program has a special meaning ... to soldiers," she said.

Upon receiving her key, Metcalf said: "I just can't say how much it means to my family to have our own home."

Metcalf is a single mother of two teenagers, Brian and Sarah, and works at Dermatology & Allergy Specialists of Olympia. City Councilman Jeff Kingsbury next awarded a key to Ross, a licensed massage practitioner and single mother to Corbin, 8, and a foster parent for several children, including, Christopher, 3.

“This is one of my favorite days of the year,” Kingsbury said. Taking her key, Ross said, “I have no way of describing how grateful I am for this amazing opportunity.”

Thurston County Commissioner Karen Valenzuela presented the third key for the Sahli family. She recounted how she felt when she became a first-time homeowner 15 years ago, in the house where she still lives. A tearful Mohamed Salhi accepted the key.

“I promise you not to cry, but I can’t,” he said. “Thank you so much.”

The last key presenter was Susan Dreyfus, the new secretary of the state Department of Social and Health Services. She passed the key to someone who worked more closely with the project, then to McAllister.

“I just want to thank everybody for building a house for my family,” McAllister said.