

Building blitz

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There's a lot of words that can be used to describe the process of building a house.

"Blitz" isn't usually one of them.

Habitat for Humanity of Eagle and Lake Counties has just embarked on a "blitz build" project in the Buckhorn Valley subdivision in Gypsum. Partnering with Rick Hermes of Hermes Custom Homes, and with a variety of subcontractors and businesses who have volunteered their services and materials, Habitat aims to construct a house from top to bottom within a time period about the length of the holiday season.

"Blessings come in lots of ways. This has got to be the biggest one I ever had," says Edwards resident Evie Bopp, who, along with her husband, Steve and their two young grandchildren, will occupy the new house.

A family's need

The Bopps are in serious need of a new home. They've been living in a deteriorating, single-wide mobile home in Edwards for 15 years.

Seven years ago, the Bopps took custody of their grandsons, Shawn and Alex Knuckey. The kids, now ages 12 and 10, have never had their own bedroom. They sleep on a futon and a couch in the Bopp's cramped living room. The kids' clothes and belongings are crammed into a corner in the Bopp's bedroom.

Five years ago, Evie, 54, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. The ravages of the disease forced her to quit the cleaning business that she and her husband operated. She's now wheelchair bound, and legally blind. She's finding it hard to move around in the narrow, crowded mobile home.

The Bopps own their mobile home, but struggle to get by on Steve's wages. Their monthly space rent, now at \$760, increases annually. When a friend suggested that the Bopps might qualify for a Habitat for Humanity house, Evie followed through and filled out an application. Habitat generally seeks partner families, whose incomes fall between 25-50 percent of the median income of the community where the house is located. Applicants are evaluated, using a set of criteria that includes an assessment of current living conditions, ability to pay a mortgage, and the willingness of the family to invest a significant number of "sweat equity" hours in the construction of the house. The Bopps more than qualified for a Habitat home.

A developer's commitment

The Bopp's need for better living quarters dovetailed with a commitment that Hermes, a dedicated Habitat for Humanity supporter, made at last year's fund-raising Carpenter's Ball. He offered to build a home for a family in need, and to build it quickly.

Hermes, whose company normally builds multi-million dollar custom homes in the up-valley resort communities, was ready. He



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Developer Rick Hermes is spearheading construction of this Habitat for Humanity home with help from TAB Associates, an Avon architectural firm, and other subcontractors.



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and his partner, George Sanders, are providing the services of their staff on a volunteer basis. Other subcontractors have been invited to donate their time and skills. The goal is to complete home construction in two months.

"We are fortunate to build such beautiful homes for a large group of people that have been very fortunate in their lives. I think we should take a hard look to see what we can pass on to people who haven't been as fortunate," says Hermes.

Initially, Hermes was aiming to complete the project by Christmas. However, delays in the initial planning stages forced a later start than anticipated. Evie Bopp notes that the footers are in place, and work is about to start on the foundation. She'll be content if she can get into the home by her birthday in February.

Habitat Director of Operations Holly Woods notes that the "blitz build" project is the first of its kind in Eagle and Lake Counties. Typically, Habitat homes are built in a period of six to eight months. That time period can stretch out longer, because most of the work is done by volunteers.

Elsewhere, "blitz build" projects have produced homes in time periods, ranging from three hours to a couple of months.

"It happens fast. You get everyone on the site, and they make it happen," says Woods.

That's the strategy Hermes is using with the Bopps' house. Crews that are working on custom homes throughout the valley are currently pre-framing walls for the modest residence, which will be transported to the Buckhorn Valley site. The living space of the three bedroom, one-bath house will be 1,193 sq. ft., plus a 550-square-foot garage. The house will include handicap access features, such as wide hallways and doors.

Hermes notes that the home, which is much smaller scale than the projects his crews are accustomed to building in communities such as Bachelor Gulch, Arrowhead, Cordillera, and Red Sky Ranch, should proceed quickly.

"It is a matter of proper management and timing. There's no wasting of time between the trades (subcontractors) to get it done," explains Hermes, "When we get there (to the site), we'll be ready to go."

Subcontractors step up

Subcontractors, ranging from architects to engineers, to tradesmen and suppliers, have been generous in signing onto the project.

TAB Associates of Avon donated architectural services. Rocky Mountain Reprographics reproduced plans and blueprints, free of charge. Johnson Kunkel & Associates of Eagle donated some engineering services. Subcontractors are lining up to provide electrical, plumbing, and other labor. The town of Gypsum has worked closely with the developers to facilitate the timing of the project.

"I couldn't be more happy with the way the subcontractors have stepped up to the plate," says Hermes, "It was a bit of a risk. I opened my mouth before I talked to these boys."

The Bopp house is the third home that TAB Associates has designed for Habitat.

"Hopefully, there will be a lot more. We just try to give as much as we can back to the community. It is something that we feel is important, and we are happy to do it," says architect Tab Boniday. The handicap access aspect of the Bopp house made the design work a little more challenging than a typical house design.

Edwards Building Center has supplied framing materials for the house. General Manager Mike Burk says this is the first Habitat project the company has been involved with.

"When they told us what they were doing, we were happy to step in. We look at it as partnering with a client, and doing what is right for a community. We're very proud to help," says Burk.

Hermes is not surprised about the reaction from the construction community that he has worked with for the past 15 years.

"I know they share our beliefs in the community, and our values. We help out wherever we can. It was just a natural that they would step up," says Hermes.

Barbara Duncan, who serves as a developer representative for Hermes Custom Homes, and also serves on the local Habitat for

Humanity board, says one of the challenges has been to keep the project within Habitat's policy of providing "simple, decent housing." Duncan notes that the organization makes a point of avoiding "creeping affluence" in the Habitat house projects.

"The subs (contractors) want to make this a first-class home. We've had to simplify the house a couple of times in order to meet Habitat standards ... it's a fun sort of problem to have," she admits.

Duncan, too, has noted that local contractors are very willing to give back to the community.

"This operation has a real team spirit," she says.

At press time, construction crews were clearing snow from the site so that foundation work could proceed.

Steve and Evie Bopp have already started packing their family possessions. They snapped a photograph of the building site, and are sending it out in their Christmas cards. They are confident they will soon be living in the new home.

"It will happen. They (Habitat and the contractors) have been sweet enough, and trust us enough to do it," says Evie.

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