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Habitat for Humanity: Transforming lives

Work to begin in September on 19th Neighborhood Revitalization Program house, in partnership with Pride Build

By Amanda Fein

Community contributor

I have had the great opportunity of being manager of Individual and Corporate Gifts for Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery County, MD, Inc. (HFH-MC) for almost two years now. In that time, I have witnessed many dreams becoming reality and many lives transformed through the wonderful work of the organization.

Since 1982, HFH-MC has sold 62 homes to deserving and qualified low-income families in Montgomery County. Through the HFH-MC program, selected HFH-MC partner families purchase their homes at below-market rates, with 1 percent down, through a 30-year, 0-percent interest mortgage. This allows for an affordable mortgage payment so that families cannot just focus on surviving, but actually thrive.

Before moving into them, these families had previously been living in substandard (and sometimes dangerously unhealthy) conditions. In 2009, HFH-MC began the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). The NRP has allowed HFH-MC to acquire vacant, distressed homes and rehabilitate them to make them simple, decent and energy efficient. This program has allowed HFH-MC to essentially recycle a home, which not only transforms the lives of the family moving into the home,



Habitat for Humanity Mike Meller, Colleen Dermody and Somerset Mayor Jeffrey are members of the Pride Build Committee that has raised more than half of the \$60,000 needed to rehabilitate a vacant house in Silver Spring in partnership with Habitat for Humanity.



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but transforms the neighborhood by putting hard working, taxpaying citizens into a former distressed home.

In September, HFH-MC will begin construction on the 19th NRP home. This home will be HFH-MC's first Pride Build



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home. HFH-MC is only the third Habitat affiliate in the nation to embark on this program, and the first on the East Coast. We are thrilled to be partnering with the LGBT community to raise money and rehabilitate the home.

I was approached about the possibility of doing the Pride Build project by Bob Bernstein, former president of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and long-time Montgomery County resident. HFH-MC has had other "specialty builds" such as our Women Build program and our Inter-Faith House, so we jumped at the opportunity to work with the LGBT community. Working with the LGBT community, and specifically with our Pride Build committee, has been an amazing experience. The LGBT community in Montgomery County has embraced the fight against poverty housing, which was evident at a fundraiser we had for Pride Build in May. More than 80 people, including Congressman Chris Van Hollen, attended and donated to the cause.

Pride Build has a long road ahead. Though construction will begin in September, there is a lot of work to be done on the home before the family moves in. We expect construction on this home to take up to six months.

Additionally, rehabilitation on the Pride Build home will cost more than \$60,000. The Pride Build committee has already raised 2/3 of that through events, corporate sponsorship and solicitation of friends and families.

I know that through Pride Build, the lives of a family in need will be forever changed. Through the support of the LGBT community, I hope that Pride Build will become an annual event for our affiliate.

Fein is manager of Individual and Corporate Gifts for Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.

'Making the total community healthy and strong'

By Michael Meller

Community contributor

I was first asked to be a part of the Pride Build project in December of 2010. At that time, I was working as a Legislative Policy Fellow for my Maryland state delegate, Heather Mizeur, who was very energized by "all things Maryland," including the LGBT community.

She reminded me that the LGBT community is not separate or isolated, but a valued, integral part of the greater whole. When the Pride Build project surfaced, it spoke directly to that point. Through Pride Build, Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery County, MD, Inc (HFH-MC) has embraced LGBT people and has clearly demonstrated the important role we play in making the total community healthy and strong.

This sense of inclusion was also voiced by Bob Bernstein, a former senior official with Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), who is responsible for bringing Pride Build to the DC area. While visiting Portland, OR, Bob witnessed the success of their Pride Build project. He saw that when people of every background worked together, then social labels and biases melt away.

Over the past seven months, I have had the pleasure of working with an extraordinary group of LGBT leaders who have worked tirelessly by reaching out to their many friends and colleagues to promote Pride Build. We have received the personal support of U.S. Congressman Chris Van Hollen, State Senator Rich Madaleno, State Delegates Bonnie Cullison, Anne Kaiser, Susan Lee, Heather Mizeur, Jeff Waldstreicher and Mary Washington, as well as Mayors Jeffrey Slavin (Somerset), David Lublin (Chevy Chase) and Peter Fosselman (Kensington).

Through its LGBT Employee Resource Group, One Marriott, Marriott International has stepped up to be a major corporate sponsor. The Sanford and Doris Slavin Foundation has extended their extraordinary philanthropy by recognizing Pride Build with their generosity.

Our HFH-MC partners have made it clear that they want qualified LGBT families to apply for home ownership. They also encourage LGBT trade professionals, specifically plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians and drywall installers to bid on this Pride Build home, as well as on all other HFH-MC construction projects.

The Pride Build effort is touching not only the deserving family who will own this wonderful home, but also all the local LGBT residents along with their friends, families and associates who have rallied together. The awareness and momentum generated by this project should lead to many more Pride Build homes in the future for HFH-MC, as well as endeavors with other Habitat affiliates.

Meller is the Pride Build Committee chair.

For more information, visit Pride Build at www.habitat-mc.org/events/pride_build.html or www.habitat-mc.org.

Montgomery County Young Democrats will sponsor "Home is Where the Art Is" to benefit Pride Build 6-9 p.m. Aug. 24 at Pyramid Atlantic, 8230 Georgia Ave. in Silver Spring.

The event will feature live music, food, beverages and door prizes, and participants will get the chance to create a piece of art.

Cost is \$40 for MCYD high school members and \$45 for high non-members; \$60 for MCYD young professional members and \$65 for young professional non-members; and \$90 for MCYD young at heart members and \$100 for young at heart non-members. Anyone who does not want to get involved in making art can watch for \$20.

Purchase tickets at <http://pridebuild.eventbrite.com>.

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