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**WOMEN VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATE MOTHER'S DAY
BY BUILDING AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR BROOKLYN FAMILIES**

VOLUNTEERS RAISE MORE THAN \$40,000 TO HELP WITH CONSTRUCTION COSTS

Women of all walks of life and all ages—with all levels of construction skills—celebrated Mother's Day by building affordable homes for nine Brooklyn families in need, many of them headed by single mothers.

Sponsored by **Habitat for Humanity – New York City**, the annual **Women Build** featured all-women crews working together to help solve the city's housing crisis and revitalize a low-income neighborhood. They sheet-rocked walls, dug ditches and cleared rubble on the site of the new homes.

"This is a wonderful tribute of love and respect to mothers throughout New York City," said **Shauna Long**, who serves on Habitat-NYC's Board of Directors. "Our city's housing crisis affects everyone, and it unfortunately hurts women and families most of all. Half of all New York City families headed by women live in poverty."

The volunteers raised more than \$40,000 to help cover the construction costs of the row of three-story buildings in Bedford-Stuyvesant, which includes a total of nine condo units.

For the sixth year, eight women carpenters from the NYC District Council of Carpenters joined Habitat-NYC's Women Build. **Nefertari Barnes**, who helped organized the team of women carpenters, said, "This is a wonderful opportunity for our sisters to share their knowledge and skills, gain more confidence in leadership roles, lend a hand to their community and represent our union's strength and skills."

Also joining the event were **Elizabeth Cruz**, an aide to Congresswoman **Nydia Velázquez**, and **Priscilla Olivo**, President of the Greater New York Chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction.

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“New York City is the richest city in the nation—but the poorest in housing,” Cruz said, encouraging volunteers to support government policies that will foster more affordable housing.

Across the nation—and especially in New York City—the dire shortage of safe and affordable housing is a women’s issue:

- Families with children represent 40 percent of households with “worst-case” housing needs—those renters who pay more than half their income for rent, live in substandard housing, or are displaced against their will.
- In New York City, one out of every two families headed by a woman lives below the poverty line.

“Thank you for helping to build a home for me and my two children,” Amira Martin, one of the building’s future homeowners, told volunteers. “I am so touched that you would come out and give your time to help us.”

Volunteers had many reasons for spending a day building homes with other women.

- McGill University student **Amy Cobb**, who has built with Habitat in the past, invited her mother to join her in this unique Mother’s Day celebration. Her mother, **Phyllis Cobb**, said, “I’ve always been extremely proud of my daughter’s sense of outreach and commitment to a better world. I can’t begin to tell you how honored I feel to be able to have this hands-on experience.”
- **Monique Wells** came to honor the memory of her mother, **Virginia Scott Wells**, who passed away in 2004. “My mother was a humanitarian and loved people. She always volunteered her time and the little money she had to help people in need. This was the least I could do to honor her memory.”
- **Fran Sullivan**, 67, was happy to spend her day loading rocks and rubble into a dumpster. “As a retiree, I have the time, commitment and strength to make a contribution to a project that will provide a real home to someone. It doesn’t get more concrete than that.”
- **Pat Shevlin** came to honor her mother, a widow who raised five children alone. “The fact that we never lost our home is a testament to my mother’s strength, faith and personal sacrifice. As the oldest, I knew how close we came to being homeless. We may have had no heat on occasion and no phone on occasion, but we had a roof over our heads.”
- **Tawanna Lewis** also knows first-hand how perilous New York City’s housing market is. This Bronx mother of four lives in a dangerous, two-bedroom, fifth-floor walk-up. “I’m here to give back to other single mothers,” she said. “I have learned that there are people in worse situations than I am in. I feel that helping other mothers who want the same thing I want—providing a safe and good home for their children—is a blessing.”

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- **Veronica Santiago** gave birth to her first child at age 15. “I was told that my life was over, that I would never amount to anything,” she recalls. Undaunted, Veronica was driven to finish school, find a job and an apartment. “I promised my next move would be to my own home,” Veronica recalls. “It took 12 years to save for a down payment, but I finally realized my dream in 2004. . . I know how hard it was to reach that goal, and I want to help other mothers do the same.”

Habitat-NYC’s Halsey Street homes are “green” buildings, constructed with environmentally friendly materials and energy-efficient methods that will help protect the health—and pocketbooks—of the future residents. Nicknamed the “Coffee Cup Buildings,” these are among the first buildings in New York City to be constructed of Insulated Concrete Forms (ICF). This highly energy-efficient and strong material features a core of cement coated with polystyrene, resembling coffee cups.

To be eligible for a Habitat home, families must earn 45 to 80 percent of the area mean income, be willing to contribute sweat equity and be living in substandard conditions or paying more than 50 percent of their income in rent. Future homeowners will contribute a minimum of 300 hours per adult of “sweat equity” and will assume affordable mortgages, with payments of no more than 33 percent of their income.

Habitat-NYC transforms lives and our city by uniting all New Yorkers around the cause of decent, affordable housing. With the help of an average of 10,000 volunteers every year, Habitat-NYC has built more than 170 affordable homes in the five boroughs of New York City.

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