

Families Receive Homes Built by VHS Students



Rita Jimenez | Daily Sun

Susan and Aubrey Rutz, center, stand in front of their newly dedicated home Tuesday in Bushnell. Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter selects working families that can qualify for a mortgage on a house.

Students from The Villages High School's Construction Management Academy built both homes from start to finish.

By GARRETT SHIFLET
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Beneath a freshly-finished roof, students and community members gathered to celebrate two families' dreams come true.

Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter and The Villages High School's Construction Management Academy held its joint home dedication ceremonies Tuesday in Bushnell.

Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter selects working families that can qualify for a mortgage on a house that is built through partnership.

The Rutz and Cummings families were present to be honored by all the builders and partners that helped finish the home.

"It's overwhelming and it's exciting," said Susan Rutz. "It feels like it's been coming for a really long time and it just feels surreal that we're actually going to be moving in here in a couple of weeks."

After months of waiting, the weight is finally off her shoulders.

All Rutz could think about doing first in her new home was thanking God.

"I'm going to every room and just say a prayer," Rutz said. "Just praying that God watches over us the entire time we're in the house, keeps us safe and just thank him for every single room."

Habitat for Humanity Lake-Sumter deals with dozens of

from the front page



Photos by Rita Jimenez | Daily Sun

Nolancia Johnson, left, listens as her mother Crystal Cummings speaks during a home dedication ceremony for Susan Rutz on Tuesday in Bushnell.



A Bible quote from 2 Peter 1:2 is written on the window of a home built by students of The Villages High School's Construction Management Academy.

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families trying to find a spot on its homeownership program said Veronica Troxell, Habitat's programs director.

"Families stress all year it's really hard for them to believe that they're approved and getting the home," Troxell said. "I spend a lot of the year reassuring them and making sure they're comfortable. To get here to the end is really great because they're more confident and they've done the hard work."

Families have to perform "sweat equity" in order to receive the home's affordable mortgage which can include financial literacy courses, volunteering on the project.

After all that hard work, the home dedications are moment for everyone to reflect.

"We get to see everyone come together that made it possible and the families feel that love," Troxell said.

Crystal Cummings technically received the keys to her home around a month ago but was happy to be honored at the ceremony.

"It's the best feeling ever, I accomplished a goal and dream of mine," Cummings said. "It's a very quiet neighborhood which I'm not used to. It's great to have my own yard and it's just fabulous."

Cummings said she was appreciative of the students who helped build a home for her and her daughter to live in.

"It's really great," Cummings said. "They're changing lives one house at a time."

Students worked on the home building projects throughout this school year, coming out for morning and afternoon shifts on the job sites.

Around 30 students would be involved in the project this year including Jolin Spafford.



Students of The Villages High School's Construction Management Academy hold up a sign made by Susan and Aubrey Rutz during the home dedication ceremony.

"It feels amazing that I'm giving back to the community in many different ways," Spafford said. "I took a lot from this class and learned a lot about myself and learned a lot about others."

Students have to work together every day in order to get the houses done on time and ready for the ceremonies.

The students in the academy gain hands-on experience working with contractors as they build the home from the ground up, including siding, roofing trusses and framing.

"I'm always amazed by what the students can do throughout the year and what they accomplish," said Bruce Haberle, one of the instructors for the academy.

Haberle was thankful to everyone that keeps the program running.

"We really can't say enough about our community partners," Haberle said. "The parents are certainly all in. The morning class starts at 7 a.m. so they help get those kids out the door and get to work."

The Rutz's house was

sponsored by RoMac Distribution, a subsidiary of RoMac Building Supply, which provided building supplies, support and materials.

"We love being a supporter of our community," Distribution General Manager Justin Cooper said during the ceremony. "They give so much love to us, we love to be able to give back."

The Cummings' home was sponsored by Citizens First Bank.

The Construction Management Academy has also put the finishing touches on two other homebuilding projects it with Building Homes for Heroes. Building Homes for Heroes, founded in 2006, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports veterans with everything from financial hardships to a home gifting program. The academy and Building Homes for Heroes will be celebrating two veteran families receiving each a brand new home on Thursday in Lake Panasoffkee.

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