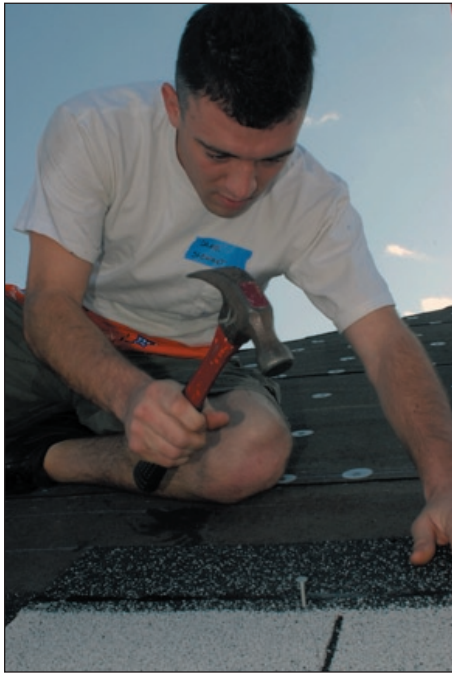


Paying it Forward with Habitat for Humanity

Story and Photos by PA1 Jennifer Johnson, District Seven Public Affairs

Nearly 200 Coast Guard active duty, reserve, civilian and Auxiliary members, from throughout South Florida arrived ready to sweat for a good cause at the Habitat for Humanity, Hearts and Hands, Blitz Build in Miami Jan. 14-26.



Petty Officer 3rd Class Dane Stewart, of Sector Miami, puts some power behind his swing installing roof tiles for a Habitat for Humanity home being built in the Scott-Carver neighborhood of Miami. The Scott-Carver neighborhood was ridden with drugs and violence before it was finally demolished eight years ago.

The build was a two-week task in which thousands of volunteers dedicated time and energy building the final 10 of 52 homes replacing the former drug and violence-ridden Scott-Carver projects demolished eight years ago.

“Being a yeoman in the Coast Guard, I am not directly related to saving lives and this is my way of saving a life or giving back,” said first-time volunteer, Petty Officer 3rd Class Ryan Hardge, of Sector Miami.

Habitat for Humanity, created in 1976, seeks to eliminate poverty and homelessness and has built more than 225,000 homes around the world since its inception 32 years ago. The idea brings together sponsors, volunteers and homeowners to give families access to homeownership at a price they can afford.

“This is a different experience than just sending a check,” said Michelle Marcos, communications director for Habitat for Humanity of Greater Miami. “It is great to see a face

associated with what we are doing, and here you get to work right alongside homeowners.”

Marcos says there are always more applicants than houses available, but people chosen to be homeowners of a Habitat for Humanity home must commit to building one day a week for as long as it takes to finish their home.

“This is not a giveaway program,” said Marcos. “Homeowners have to put in a minimum of 250 hours of sweat equity.”



Petty Officer 3rd Class Brendan Rogers, of Sector Miami, paints the trim of a Habitat for Humanity home in the Scott-Carver neighborhood of Miami during the Hearts and Hands Blitz Build.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Jose Urbina of the Naval Engineering Support Unit at Sector Miami caulks a window at a Habitat for Humanity home being built in the Scott-Carver neighborhood of Miami. Coast Guard volunteers devoted 10 days of their time and energy helping to finish up the final 10 of 52 homes built in the Scott-Carver neighborhood.

Guard Integrated Support Command in Miami, believes volunteering for events such as this is just a little payback and makes you feel thankful for everything you have.

“Our Coast Guard volunteers are always the hardest working group,” said Marcos. “Ninety-five percent of our volunteers have no experience, but the Coast Guard people know their way around a construction site.”

The Scott-Carver neighborhood re-build took 18 months but all 52 families are settled into a place they can truly call home. They are creating new family traditions and building memories that will last a lifetime. As for all the volunteers, they will always remember they had a hand at creating in future for people who needed it.

Families are selected for homeownership based on their level of need, willingness to become partners in the program and their ability to repay the loan. Habitat homes in the United States cost homeowners an average of \$60,000. But in the interest of continuing the cycle of giving, mortgage payments are turned around to pay for additional Habitat homes.

The Scott-Carver project of building 52 homes took a total of 18 months, and 38 of its new homeowners were once residents during the neighborhood’s darker days.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Jose Urbina, a returning Habitat for Humanity volunteer, from the Naval Engineering Support Unit at the Coast



Latoya McMath and her family’s biography hang at the front door of her new Habitat for Humanity home in the Scott-Carver neighborhood of Miami so volunteers and sponsors can see just who will benefit from all their assistance. Family’s chosen for a Habitat for Humanity home must volunteer at least one day per week and a minimum of 250 hours.