

Family can now stay home for the holidays

By Kathleen E. Carey, kcarey@delcotimes.com



Robin Toogood and her children were able to move into the house at 928 Madison St. in Chester thanks to the plethora of volunteers and Habitat for Humanity.

Paula E. Doyle photo

CHESTER — Robin Toogood was resplendent as she walked around the first floor of 928 Madison St., the home she was moving into Saturday.

The move was due to the efforts of Habitat for Humanity Delaware County and J. Schwartz Construction Management and Fine Home Building in Malvern that dedicated months to finishing her three-bedroom home just in time for the holidays. "It's wonderful," Toogood said, receiving hugs from next-door neighbor Rochelle Burks. "It all just fell into place. It's truly a blessing."

She explained she was required to help with paint and other tasks before she and her two children, 21 and 17, moved into the home.

"Now, I'm a homeowner," Toogood beamed.

Toogood won \$1,000 from the Chester Partners in Homeownership to purchase her first home and \$500 toward homeowners' insurance from the Fair Housing Council of Suburban Philadelphia at last year's Chester Homebuyer Fair.

Her 1,200-square-foot house was part of five on Madison Street identified as a "Home Builders Blitz Build" that started in June 2006. Toogood's home was the final home in that project to be completed. Habitat's Delaware County president, Bernard J. Callahan III, said this represented the completion of the organization's largest project to date.

"It's a very happy day," he said.

Yet, both he and board member Brian O'Shea said difficulties lay ahead. "Our biggest challenge is finding the next property here in Chester," O'Shea

said, explaining economic development is hampering efforts to local properties.

"It creates a big problem," he added, "because you have families in need."

O'Shea said three elements are needed for a Habitat for Humanity project: the ability to gather volunteers, funding and locating properties.

"You've got to get all three right or the model doesn't work," he said.

One aspect they all share is the volunteerism, especially as the house nears completion.

Callahan explained as it gets closer, volunteers' spouses and children participate.

That included O'Shea's 11-year-old daughter, Maddie, who was sanding walls and painting to help make 928 Madison a home for the Toogoods.

"I know it went to a good cause," she said.

Volunteers have been helping since July, including Joe Schwartz and the variety of subcontractors who added their specialty to the home.

Frank Zinni of Frank's Custom Crafts in Collingdale added this home to the four he's installed countertops in for Habitat.

Marie DiCesare works with him and spoke of their motivation: "To help somebody out so they have a place to hang their hats."

The neighbors were grateful Toogood was moving to the community, but also for the effort that was placed in their homes.

"I think that the volunteers of this project should be overly ecstatic because of the job that they did," Burks said. She moved into her Habitat home, 930 Madison, in June.

"It's not just good, it was excellent," she said. "The program has just been a blessing."

She said she couldn't wait to have barbecues with Toogood in their backyards.



To help Habitat for Humanity Delaware County either by volunteering or with funds or with identifying properties, please call (610) 872 5424. Their address is 419 Avenue of the States, Suite 403, Chester, PA 19013 or P.O. Box 656, Chester, PA 19016.