

Spring/Summer 2020



NEWSLINK

We build affordable homes on the foundation of Christian love, where families are provided a secure environment and together a community is established.



From the President

Ron Laughter, President and CEO

Break Shot

The game of billiards begins with all of the numbered balls nicely aligned on the table in the form of a triangle. Then, to start the game, a player takes the cue ball to the other end of the table and shoots it into the carefully arranged balls at the table's head. This is called the "break shot", and things go from order to chaos in an instant. This seems like an apt metaphor for what happened to Habitat when the coronavirus came into our lives. We rapidly went from knowing what we were doing to a moment of total chaos.

Very quickly we realized that "the way we've always done it" wasn't going to work anymore. The government was telling us we had to close our ReStore Operations, that the very folks we relied on to construct and repair houses were in the "high risk" population that needed to be protected from infection. In addition, we were encouraged to, whenever possible, have employees work from home. Couple all that with a "stay at home" order, and we had to quickly come up with a new game plan. As important as continuing our construction efforts if at all possible was the commitment on the part of the Board of Directors to keep all of our employees fully engaged during this period of lockdown. In response, we directed all our volunteers to stay home and safe, we closed all of our ReStores, and redeployed our ReStore staff to Dodd Meadows in East Flat Rock to work under our skilled construction professionals. This enabled us to continue our house construction efforts without the aid of our volunteers. We were able to do this because home construction was declared an essential function, so our construction efforts were not shut down as many businesses were.

People were taking on roles that they were not hired to do, nor necessarily trained to do. The lack of training was not difficult to overcome. But figuring how to construct a house while maintaining social distancing was a challenge that needed monitoring every day. Finding and keeping in stock personal protective equipment, sanitizers, and proper cleaning supplies proved to be a daunting challenge as well. But accomplish all that we did. And I'm pleased to report that, in the midst of all this chaos, we have been able to transfer title to three qualified families.

Now our efforts are focused on getting back to "normal". Our ReStores are slowly reopening, our Homeowner Services Department continues to work virtually with families who want to get into the Habitat program, and we are looking forward to the day when we can safely reengage our wonderful volunteers. Unfortunately, none of us can know what the new normal is going to look like and what we will need to do to properly respond to it. What is certain is Habitat will continue to do all it can to meet its mission of putting qualified families into safe and affordable housing where they can raise their families and reap the rewards of homeownership.

In this edition of NewsLink, you will see in more detail the efforts we have put forth to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, happy families now in their own homes, and one of our approved clients still waiting for her home who, in her own words tells her COVID-19 story. Please enjoy this edition, and thank you for supporting Habitat and our extremely important mission.

Lessons Learned from Our Homeowners

A future homeowner shared with us the impact that COVID-19 has had on her journey as a homeowner. This letter reminds us why we do what we do each day and why the mission of Habitat is so important during these trying times:

In the beginning of all this chaos, I did not believe that I myself would be affected in anyway by the virus. But what one does not realize is that you do not have to actually get the virus to be directly affected. 2020 has been a very challenging year thus far.

When the virus started, my job was greatly affected. I work for a manufacturing company that produces, delivers and sells clothes and accessories all over the world. Many of our stores closed overseas due to the illness. That alone started our hardship. Work began to slow and we all started to ask questions and worry if we would survive this. As the virus grew and showed up in America more of our stores put a hold on deliveries. This started a whole new situation in our company. We started to have a loss of hours and pay. I myself live paycheck to paycheck putting as much money as I can into savings each week. I knew if this continued I would have to start using my savings to support me and my daughter. I was and still am scared for this. The change at work was extremely noticeable. People began to disappear, less and less boxes to unpack as pallets were delivered to stations, then all of a sudden we went to 20 hours a week. Unemployment became a part of my new future. Within two weeks, somehow, our owners were able to supply enough work for the first shift to return to 40 hours a week and maintain a steady work flow. Second shift is still out of work as we speak.

I have not just been worried about my job. I have also been extremely worried about my home and if I was still going to have a home. Classes got cancelled, then all volunteer time was postponed till further notice. I know we all need to stay safe and help keep each other safe but for 22 years I have dreamed of this home and I was so close and I slowly felt like again it was being taken away from me. I worked so hard to get to where I am now and it would break me if it just fell through. My daughter has also been upset about the whole thing. She was looking forward to her own room, already making plans for colors and decorations. Then when the virus stopped everything, she cried. She too thought it was not going to happen for us once again. It has been so hard to deal with. The uncertainties of what is going on, where I was in the process, if they were still going to work on my home and how I was ever going to get the rest of my volunteer time finished. I still have two more classes to do. After a couple of weeks of worry, tears, and being too scared to call Habitat myself, I got a call. My house wouldn't be done at the end of June anymore. I was going back to my original location and should be in the home sooner than planned. I was excited to hear that. However, I am still a little unsure as to what all is going on with the home so yea, I am worried. But I have faith it is going to work out for the best.

I believe all of this has happened for a reason. We have all forgotten what is most important in life. We have gotten away from family, friends and have turned to working all the time and playing on our electronics. Since this has happened I have been able to spend more time with my girls and grand daughter. I have noticed how my children have been more interactive in their lives as well. Off their phones and television, spending more time with their sisters and visiting their grand parents more. I have been able to see a change in my youngest. She hated going to school for some time and seemed to be depressed and tried her hardest to not do her homework. Now, she gets on the computer for her classes and not only does her work but helps the other students when they do not understand the information or need help figuring out a problem. She is much happier and more outspoken than ever.....(cont. page 4)



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More News



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Our Homeowner Services team has been working from home following COVID 19 social distancing protocols for the past month, but is continuing to follow up with all of our current and future homeowners. Habitat closed on a new house March 26th and on another house on April 29th. On May 27th we closed on our third house since the pandemic. We have had to rethink how to conduct these closings by maintaining social distancing, conferencing via Zoom with our homebuyers, and utilizing the US Postal Service to send paperwork. Staff is very happy to spend the extra time it has taken to finalize the closings though, because it means that a new homeowner is able to move into their new house, despite the global pandemic.

Staff also continues to accept and process new applications and will be conducting the first virtual "home visit" in order to keep moving forward with our program. Also, Jill Franklin, our Director of Homeowner and Mortgage Services, recently received certification as a USDA loan packager. This will help increase the number of applicants Habitat can serve in the future, as well as add a new loan product for qualified low-income homebuyers.

Congratulations, Lisa and Izzy!



Lisa recently closed on her Habitat home in the Dodd Meadows community on March 26th. Despite putting herself through college and supporting herself and her young daughter, she continued to run into obstacles that prevented her from realizing her dream of a home of their own, but she never gave up on her dream of homeownership. Fortunately, she heard about Habitat from a friend and decided to apply.

She completed the required classes and 200 hours of "sweat equity". Lisa's closing was a bit untraditional due to COVID-19. We met and maintained social distancing to sign the closing documents, but it was a success! She is now the proud owner of a safe, affordable, energy efficient home. Her daughter, Izzy, has already picked out the first decorations that she plans to hang in her new bedroom.

Restore News

On, Tuesday May 12th our Henderson County Habitat for Humanity Restore opened for business. During this time, we continue to practice safe practices in order to keep our employees and customers safe. Employees will be wearing masks, using social distancing rules and increased sanitation of high touch areas. We continue to accept donations of gently used building and home items. The drop off locations in Hendersonville are now open for your convenience. If you have been spring cleaning and wondering what to do with those items, come on in and drop them off.

If you would like to shop online, please come out and visit us on Facebook by searching Henderson County Habitat for Humanity. For our Restore in Landrum find us at Thermal Belt Habitat Restore. If something catches your eyes give us a call to check on availability. Please call our store at 828-696-9524, In addition we opened our Fletcher and Landrum stores on Tuesday, May 26th from 9:00-3:00. Please come on out and view our new inventory of items.

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I was on my way home from the doctors office last week and headed down 191 when I started seeing people out in their yards holding signs with students names, "Falcon Pride" and "Senior 2020" on them. Then I heard yelling and honking and other amazing sounds as a parade of vehicles passed each of these Seniors and congratulated them for graduating. Our Community had come together in a horrid time to help uplift those young men and women that would not walk across the stage like every other graduate did in years past. The smiles and cheers as they passed not only made me proud to be a part of this community but brought tears down my face as I watched teachers, parents, other students, and neighbors celebrate these students. I remember thinking to myself that this had been the first time since the outbreak that I noticed our community really getting together to support one another. At the start of the virus people started to become very challenging, greedy and even scared. They could be seen buying out all the cleaning supplies and toiletries they could find. People filled their buggies full of foods they could stock up on and could not possibly eat all of it before spoiling in fear the stores would close or run out of groceries. Eventually, face masks and gloves were seen more and more in public places and work. This has become a very scary situation, an epidemic.

While many of our lives have been turned upside down, I believe we could learn from all of this. Each of us can take something from this and learn to grow, to be a better person or better prepared for our future. Crystal R.