



HOME.

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Tulsa
Habitat
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A message from the Executive Director

There are many great things about working for Tulsa Habitat for Humanity, but nothing compares to the experience of dedicating a new Habitat home. For our families, this is the first home they have owned, and often, this is the first time anyone in their immediate family has owned a home. In other words, it's a really big deal!

Our families come from all walks of life and all areas of the globe. They are single parents, multi-generational families, seniors raising grandchildren, Burmese refugees, African-Americans, Latinos, Caucasians, high school graduates, college graduates, teachers, nurses, hourly workers, salaried workers.... I think you get the picture. Habitat families have the same life goals as other families. They are simply looking for a way to achieve the dream of homeownership, build wealth, climb the socioeconomic ladder and set their children on a path toward success.

In this issue, we talk to three families that demonstrate the vast diversity of those served by Tulsa Habitat. We also take a look at how a new partnership with one of Tulsa's oldest companies turns a simple concept into a major innovation in the way we construct our homes – an improvement that could one day be standard procedure. You'll also meet Diane Kaluzny, a Habitat homeowner and one of our most dedicated volunteers, and learn more about the latest activities at Tulsa Habitat for Humanity.

Lastly, I want to thank our supporters for the incredible outpouring of financial gifts as we celebrated the holidays and bid farewell to 2016. It was one of Tulsa Habitat's biggest year-end periods ever, and it was made all the sweeter knowing that each gift was doubled with a matching grant challenge. If you would like to support the work that Tulsa Habitat does, please visit us at tulсахabitat.org to make your secure contribution today.

Sincerely,

Cameron Walker
Executive Director



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Recurring giving is a convenient way to support Tulsa Habitat and allows many to make larger gifts.

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common threads

There is no such thing as the typical Habitat family, but there are a few things they all have in common.

People often ask those involved with Tulsa Habitat for Humanity to describe the people we serve. Others have preconceived ideas of who a Habitat homeowner is. In truth, there is no typical Habitat homeowner, but they do all have at least one thing in common. They want to improve their lives and circumstances through home ownership.

Tulsa Habitat seeks to help people who have a clear need for housing, who can fulfill the volunteer and educational requirements of our program and who have the ability to repay an affordable mortgage. We serve people regardless of race, age, religion, ethnicity or any of the qualities that are used to categorize and divide people, because the need for quality, safe, affordable housing is universal. This makes our client base very diverse, and, in turn, increases the diversity of the communities we are helping to build.

However, as with any population, Tulsa has demographic variables that affect the diversity of our clients. For instance, Tulsa has recently seen an influx of more than 6,000 political and economic refugees from the Zomi ethnic group of Myanmar (formerly Burma). Catholic Charities of Tulsa works with the U.S. State Department to help them resettle, helping them with housing, jobs, schools and much more. Several of these families have become homeowners through Tulsa Habitat.

Our homeowners represent many ethnicities. They practice many religions. There are some Habitat homes that are multigenerational, but we also have single homeowners. Most of our clients enter as young families, but we see people of all ages looking for a home of their own. Diane Kaluzny (page 11) is a grandmother who lives with and cares for her blind son, while new homeowner Charles Harvey is only 19 years old.

There is no cookie-cutter Habitat family. That's another thing our Habitat family members all have in common. They are each a unique story.



“We had no idea how to eat a cheeseburger, or what a pizza was.”

The American Dream

Cind Mang and Dal Suan, who have adopted the American names Judith and Joseph, can't help but laugh when asked how their lives have changed. You can tell they have no idea where to start, and once you've heard their story, you understand why.

These two young refugees from Myanmar are still adjusting to a new life, a new home, a new language, a new culture, a new city, a new country and a new couch. Furniture is a concept that is relatively new to Judith and Joseph. Options were limited in the countryside where they grew up, and life was tough. They were forced to drop out of school and start farming after 8th grade, their homes were sparse, they sat on the floor, and had no running water or electricity and they cooked on an open, indoor fire with little ventilation.

“The insides of the homes are all black from the smoke,” Judith recalls. “We had to walk miles to get wood. If there was enough wood left over after cooking, we were able to make a fire to stay warm.”

Along with the limited resources, there was a growing military presence in the region, which persecuted the Zomi minority for their Christian faith. “The soldiers used to force us Christians to carry their gear, be their slaves. We would have to carry the supplies ten miles at a time.

They would not feed us or give us water. If we refused they would beat us,” says Lucy, one of Judith's two younger sisters who live with the couple.

Seeking a better life, Joseph found work in Malaysia. Once he'd saved enough money, he sent for Judith, and they filed for refugee status. They arrived in Tulsa in 2010, and immediately began working with Catholic Charities to bring Judith's mother and sisters to join them.

Together, the family has learned the ropes of living in America, often by trial and error. Faucets, toilets and appliances, everything was new. They didn't speak English and had never driven a car. They say even figuring out the cuisine was an experience. “We had no idea how to eat a cheeseburger or what pizza was!” Judith says.

Learning on the fly is a must for the whole family. Judith's sisters Lucy and Monica are in their sophomore and junior year respectively at McClain High School. The sisters, who speak English incredibly well, considering they didn't speak it at all a year ago, are teaching themselves by reading the dictionary and immersing themselves in American culture.

“Being at McClain is helpful for learning to speak English,” says Monica. “We are the only two Burmese in the whole school, so we have to speak English.” Both girls say their favorite subject is math, mostly

because you don't need to speak English to be good at math.

In 2013, a friend introduced Judith and Joseph to Tulsa Habitat for Humanity. Joseph, who works at AAON, talks about how thankful he is for his affordable Habitat home. “Having a zero percent interest loan and an affordable home payment is very helpful,” he says. “We are saving money for our children's education. Our kids need to have a big education because we don't have much education.”

While they're still adjusting to their new life, they continue to work to get more family members out of Myanmar, so that they too may rest comfortably each night, worship safely and celebrate unabashedly each chance they get.





“We grew closer as a family when we moved into our home.”

Answered Prayers

Theodora Maxwell moved into her Habitat home on October 12th, 2003. It's a date she will never forget, and not only because it was her birthday. It also marked a rebirth for the family.

Theodora says when she heard Habitat for Humanity commercials, she didn't give them much thought, and she never expected it to be the answer to her prayers.

Theodora and her mother moved to Tulsa from Taft, Oklahoma when she was a child, and she grew up in low-income apartments. Years later, she found herself in a similar situation, as a single mom with three kids and another on the way, living in a cramped two-bedroom apartment. She realized she wanted her children to grow up in a stable home of their own. Upon praying about her situation, perhaps as a matter of divine intervention, Theodora remembered those commercials from years before.

Soon, she was enrolled in the Tulsa Habitat program and was on her way to

home ownership. She remembers her habitat homeowner group fondly. “We had a good group of people. We pushed each other and encouraged one another,” she says. “We had some long days away from our families to finish our sweat equity hours, but we had to make sacrifices that we would benefit from later. I was able to show that to my children through this process.”

Her children were the reason she bought the home, and it has paid off. Ashley, her oldest daughter is about to graduate from TCC, and is planning to attend nursing school. Aaliyah is a freshman on a full track and field scholarship at the University of Tulsa. Jeremy, a senior in high school, is currently visiting colleges and fielding Division I track and field offers. The youngest, James, is currently a freshman in high school, and hopes to attend Jackson State University and play in their marching band, the Sonic Boom of the South. He also recently started running track, following in the fast footsteps of his older siblings.

“We grew closer as a family when we moved into our home. Family came over more for gatherings,” says Jeremy. “It also helped me with my school work. I could focus better. It gave us more space, and more opportunity.”

With Ashley and Aaliyah in college, James has his very own room for the first time, which he is more than happy about. “I have been waiting for years to get my own room! And I got it this year because Aaliyah moved out,” he says. Aaliyah points out that James will soon be the only child at home. James says he has no problem with that either.





“It’s really important for me to provide a home for my kids, somewhere stable...”

The Big Move

“I’ve never properly moved,” says Rachel Cobb, a self-professed country girl from Collinsville, Okla. “My whole life I’ve never properly moved.”

Like many young adults, Rachel moved out of her family home with few possessions. She and her new husband started from scratch, furnishing their small mobile home and filling it with all the things that make a life.

A few years later, when her son Zac was five and she was pregnant with her daughter Zo, Rachel found herself starting over again. “I was at work one day and got a phone call. ‘Your house is one fire,’” Rachel says. The family lost everything. Friends and relatives pitched in and helped the family get setup in a new place, but then Rachel and her husband separated.

“I put my son and the baby and whatever would fit into the car, and we moved back into Mom’s house,” she says. Rachel says her family was amazing, but still the situation was cramped and stressful at times, with her and her two children sharing a single bedroom for six years. Space was the primary issue, and Rachel knew she had to make a change.

“My son is 13. He needs space,” Rachel says. “My daughter, she’s eight, and she’s always shared a room with me.”

She looked at getting her family into

their own home for a long time, trying to save for a down payment and get a traditional mortgage, but she says she couldn’t make it work. That’s when a friend who had volunteered with Tulsa Habitat for Humanity suggested she apply for the program.

“Habitat worked out really well,” says Rachel, “with the way the program works, with not having to have a down payment. It’s nice.”

Still, going through the program as a young mother with two children presented a number of challenges. Several nights a week, Rachel’s kids were already in bed by the time she got home, and scheduling Habitat classes and volunteer hours with work and family time was a complex juggling act. Still, she thinks it ultimately brought her family closer together.

Rachel’s journey to becoming a homeowner is full of amazing stories of generosity, for which she credits her faith, her church family, friends and relatives and the community. Once she was in the Habitat program, Rachel decided that she would really like to build her home in Collinsville. That meant she would have to provide her own land. A donor partnered with Rachel’s church to make that happen. Church members also actively volunteered in the construction process, and once Rachel was ready to move in, she was overwhelmed with gifts of furniture and

everything she needed to set up house. One friend even offered to fully furnish and decorate one room in the house.

“It’s really important for me to provide a home for my kids, somewhere stable, somewhere they can say ‘Yeah, I grew up in that house. That’s our home,’” says Rachel. “A home is something a lot of people dream of.”

Rachel’s family recently celebrated their first holiday season in the home, and they’ve experienced many other firsts there. When asked what is their favorite thing about the home, Zac says he loves being able to spend time with his family, but Zo reminds us that sometimes it’s the little things about home ownership that are the most precious.

“The thing I like best about my house is that it’s pretty because we painted the front door yellow,” she says.



New Tricks

John Zink Hamworthy Combustion helps Tulsa Habitat put a new spin on its construction model.





John Zink Hamworthy Combustion is no stranger to innovation – it’s a big part of what the company has done every day for more than 85 years. So, it was only fitting that when the Tulsa-based, global leader in emissions control and clean air combustion systems began a new partnership with Tulsa Habitat for Humanity, it would represent an advancement in our construction model.

Usually, the major components of a Tulsa Habitat dwelling are constructed on-site, during the building process. As part of our partnership with John Zink Hamworthy Combustion, Tulsa Habitat for Humanity construction supervisors worked with 50 volunteers on the Zink campus in a first-of-its-kind project, putting together the walls for two homes. Later, volunteers from John Zink Hamworthy Combustion loaded the pre-fabricated walls onto company trucks and transported them to home sites in the Kendall-Whittier neighborhood. Finally, company volunteers joined with others to raise the walls, framing two new houses, destined for Habitat homeowners.

“Prebuilding the walls for two Habitat homes at John Zink Hamworthy Combustion’s facility was an incredible feat,” says Tulsa Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Cameron Walker. “The sheer amount of lumber, people power and logistical planning that went into the day was incredible. It was amazing to see a company really get behind the effort and provide so much support to our organization.”

This successful experiment could well serve as a template for future partnerships. “In effect, off site pre-construction can streamline our home building process, and enhance our efficiency,” says Walker. “Having complete wall frame packages in the pipeline means that we are able to build more houses, but most importantly, help more families achieve the dream of homeownership.”





John Zink Hamworthy Combustion President and CEO Casey Chambers also presented Tulsa Habitat with \$10,000 to cover the cost of materials for the project, and he says he hopes this will be an ongoing relationship. "We are extremely excited about this partnership. Our employees expressed a real desire to serve with Habitat for Humanity as one of our community initiatives this year, and this gave them an opportunity to do some great work building the walls for two homes," Chambers says.



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Humans of Habitat

SPOTLIGHT



For The Kids

A Habitat homeowner and super-volunteer wants every child to have a home.

“If I can help just one child, it will have all been worth it,” says Tulsa Habitat homeowner and volunteer Diane Kaluzny. If you’ve ever met Diane, you know this phrase isn’t a cliché. Her passion for Habitat for Humanity’s mission and giving children the best opportunities is obvious. She has volunteered on almost 20 homes, and is such a loyal volunteer that you may even find her working alone, painting and doing other jobs on days when other volunteers are unavailable.

Diane is no stranger to doing things on her own. She lost her father when she was only four, and her mother died suddenly when she was 14 years old, leaving Diane and her siblings to fend for themselves. When

they lost the family home, her siblings all went their separate way, and Diane dropped out of school, ending up on the streets. “School just didn’t seem so important anymore,” says Diane. “I was pushed through to the 10th grade, but I could not read. When you don’t know how to read, you have to learn to make it in other ways.”

Despite her struggles and setbacks, Diane counts the day a friend told her about Tulsa Habitat for Humanity as a bright spot. “I volunteered on a home build before I even knew how the program worked. I was just trying to help out a family,” she says. On that first build, she learned about the program and realized that she might qualify for a Habitat home herself. She also learned how a Habitat home makes a profound impact on a child’s life. “It’s not about just putting parents in a home, it is about putting kids in a home,” she says, “that means more to me than anything.”

Diane moved into her Habitat home in 2013, where she lives with her youngest son. Her other four children are all on their own; three work for large companies and one owns her own business. “And all of them can read,” she proudly declares. Two days after she moved into her home, Diane was back volunteering for Habitat. She hasn’t slowed down. When she isn’t working on a Habitat build, you can find her working in her yard or taking reading classes at the local library.

3 WAYS 2 HELP



Donate

Your generosity makes the work of Tulsa Habitat for Humanity possible. You are the key to opening doors and improving lives of more families in our community. To make a donation or learn more, visit tulsahabitat.org.



Volunteer

Volunteers are the heart and soul of Tulsa Habitat for Humanity. Whether you’re an individual, corporate team, community/faith-based group or just a group of friends, there are many different ways for you to volunteer. Please visit tulsahabitat.org/volunteer.



Advocate

Tell your friends, family and coworkers about our collective vision for a world where everyone has a quality, affordable place to live. If you’d like to schedule a speaker to talk to a group, contact Cheryl at ckane@tulsahabitat.org.

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