

Home

June 2023



Habitat for Humanity®
of Greater Bangor

Our newest Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor homeowner, Amber (right), stands with her daughters, Daeshona (left) and Daija, in front of their home recently delivered to their Orono house lot.

A Heart for Habitat

Over the past year, I have come to recognize a common trait among the people I meet through Habitat. There is a passion, a commitment and a willingness to jump in wherever needed. I heard someone describe it as having a Heart for Habitat. I love that! Witnessing this is inspiring, given the many challenges currently impacting affordable housing in our region.

Since the pandemic, construction costs and real estate prices have dramatically increased while what a potential homeowner can afford lags significantly behind. This is what makes the mission of Habitat even more important and why we need as many hands and hearts as possible to support our work.

Beginning in 1989, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor has transformed the lives of 27 families through homeownership. Together with these families, community volunteers have come together to plan, fundraise, and build a home for each family to call their own. Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor is eager to play a larger role in addressing the affordable housing crisis. We are actively seeking funding, land, and collaborations to increase our housing production. We know now is the time to think creatively and open our hearts to this challenge. Do you have room in your heart for Habitat?

As you will read, there are many ways that you can help; each one of us has something we can contribute. Whether it is time, expertise, or a financial gift, you can be a part of the Habitat vision, where everyone has a safe and affordable place to live. Join us in putting our hearts into building homes, community and hope in Greater Bangor.

Melissa Huston, Executive Director
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor



Caring for a Caretaker: Meet our Habitat Homeowner



Cecilia Lawrence, HFHGB board member and chair of the Family Selection and Support committee (left), sits with homeowner, Amber and reviews the paperwork for Amber's new Habitat home.

For the first time in Daija's seven years, she gets to decorate her bedroom walls. "Maybe," she muses aloud to the stuffed puppy nestled in her jacket, "the walls will have unicorns and rainbows." It's a modest dream that Daija's mother, Amber, couldn't indulge until now.

Amber and her two daughters are partnering with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor (Habitat) to become first-time homeowners. Their Habitat house – currently under construction – began its journey on a back lot of Eastern Maine Community College's (EMCC) campus in Bangor. Students of EMCC's Building, Construction and Fine Woodworking program are constructing Amber's home under the guidance of their instructors.

Recently, those students huddled together and greeted Amber with a bouquet of flowers before she walked into her home for the first time. Daija and Amber weave in and out of wall framings, dodging tool buckets and extension cords, and talk about what each space will hold. Amber's older daughter, 12-year-old Daeshona, quietly surveys the three-bedroom, one-bath home. She peers into an empty space and smiles when she sees where her new bedroom will soon take shape.

Amber has longed to provide her daughters with a safe home they can call their own since moving to Bangor from her native Eastport more than a decade ago. The single mother works as a caregiver to adults with disabilities. "It's already difficult to make ends meet on my income, let alone save enough for a down payment on a home," she explains.

The homes she can afford – using a traditional bank loan – often need significant investments beyond her budget, like a new roof or upgraded heating system. "It feels like I am

stuck in a cycle and can't get ahead. No matter how hard I try, it's challenging to break out of my situation."

Increasing demand for affordable housing

Amber isn't alone. According to a Maine State Housing Authority September 2022 report, the average Maine home price increased 13% from 2021 to \$334,000 – unaffordable to approximately 72% of Maine households. Post-pandemic interest rates, low housing inventory and increased competition for homes have priced many first-time homeowners like Amber out of the market.

The Maine Affordable Housing Commission highlights Bangor and its surrounding towns will need to add 300 homes or rental units every year for the next five years to keep up with the demand.

Melissa Huston, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor, stresses, "the state of affordable housing is reaching a crisis level in our region. Habitat's homeowner program is very effective in addressing the need of the families we work with, however we have a wait list much bigger than our capacity. We need the support of donors, volunteers, and partner contractors to help our neighbors gain the security and self-reliance that homeownership provides."

(Story continued on next page)

Have a Beer, Build a Home

Do you have your beer passport yet? HabiTAP for Humanity is our on-going fundraiser that offers a refreshing way to support our work. Buy your \$40 (tax included) beer passport and redeem one beer at each participating brewery. All profits from each passport sold by HFHGB will go toward constructing a Habitat home. Visit all breweries, complete your passport by August 31, 2023 and enter to win the grand prize at the HabiTAP closing celebration!



Thank you to our corporate sponsor:



Use the QR code to buy a HabiTAP beer passport

Lewis and Eleanor Miller have each completed their first HabiTAP beer passports at Marsh Island Brewing. Eleanor says they love combining their favorite charity and their favorite pastime.

(Amber's homeowner story continued)

Keys to a bright future

Habitat works with partnering families to remove barriers to homeownership and create financial stability – and that is what Amber is counting on. She currently lives in a cramped apartment on a busy street in Bangor riddled with safety concerns like damaged cabinets and broken outdoor railings. She worries about the safety of their neighborhood and hopes for a yard where her daughters can play freely.

Initially, Amber was ineligible for a Habitat home due to her debt to income ratio when she applied two years ago. Habitat's Family Selection and Support team stepped in and worked with Amber to find ways to reduce her debt and strengthen her credit score. Through Amber's hard work and determination, she paid off her credit card debt, moved into a higher paying job and was selected to be Habitat's newest homeowner.

"Habitat homeowners are truly partners in this program," explains Cecilia Lawrence, HFHGB board member and chair of the Family Selection and Support committee. "They take part in financial education and a first-time homeownership course. In addition to paying an affordable mortgage, Habitat homeowners also invest 200 hours of 'sweat equity' into building their home which helps teach them some great skills in maintaining the house." The end goal, adds Cecilia is to position these families up to be a successful homeowners.

It takes many hands to build a home

EMCC students have finished their work on Amber's 1100 square-foot home and it moved in May to a prepared house lot located in Orono. Troy Blodgett, an EMCC faculty member overseeing the construction, says the partnership with Habitat has a big impact on students. "Yes, we teach students how to build a house, but meeting Amber and working with Habitat makes students realize it's a home. You're building someone's dreams."

Amber is looking forward to choosing her paint colors and finishes that make a house a home. She finds it still hard to fully grasp her new future, "I didn't dare tell my girls that we got the house until we were sure. I didn't want to get their hopes up." After their visit to the construction site at EMCC, she says homeownership is finally feeling real. "You can't imagine what this home means to our family." A self-described, "born caregiver," Amber is experiencing what it feels like to be given a hand up and to be cared for by her community.

There is still a lot of work to be done before Amber and her girls can move into their new home. Join Habitat in its mission to provide affordable, safe housing for families just like Amber's. Make a donation, lend a hand at the Bangor ReStore or construction site, or discover even more ways to make a difference at habitatbangor.org/volunteers. Together, we will continue to transform lives and create lasting impact in our community.



First-year EMCC Building, Construction and Fine Woodworking students (top, bottom left, bottom center) construct Amber's home under the guidance of instructor, Troy Blodgett (bottom right).



Calling all Volunteers!

We are actively recruiting volunteers for our summer build in Orono. Habitat volunteers of all skill levels will help complete the home for Amber and her daughters.

Contact Eric Jolliff,
Community Engagement Coordinator
(207) 942-8977 or
eric@habitatbangor.org

Or, sign up now at
habitatbangor.org/construction-volunteers

In the Community

We had a great time and met wonderful people during the Downtown Bangor Spring Clean Up and Earth Day

Celebration on April 22.

Habitat participated in the event along with the

City of Bangor, Bangor

Public Library, the Boys & Girls Club of Bangor, Print

Bangor, and many more. Volunteers rallied and collected

more than 40 bags of garbage and lawn debris to make our community shine.



Eric Jolliff, Community Engagement Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor, at the Spring Clean Up.



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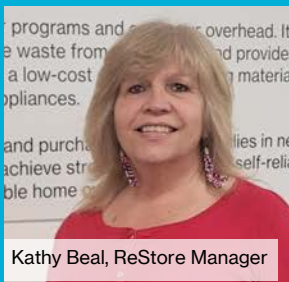


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ReStock the Restore!

If you have not visited the ReStore lately – you are in for a treat. Our team, led by the store manager, Kathy Beal, has been working hard to organize the space and make room for your donations. "We have many loyal shoppers who stop in regularly or enjoy watching our Facebook page because you never know what interesting items will come in," shares Kathy. The ReStore is an excellent place for affordable and sustainable shopping and a critical revenue stream for supporting our programming here at Habitat.

So, please remember the Habitat ReStore when you are spring cleaning or downsizing. We accept small and large donations of new or gently used furniture, appliances, housewares, building materials and more. Free pick-up is available in the Greater Bangor area.



Kathy Beal, ReStore Manager



Volunteer Spotlight

Photo CAPTION

Jim Allen was shopping at Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bangor's ReStore. During his visit, he approached the manager and offered to fix a broken chair that he noticed on the sales floor. That was five years ago. Since then, Jim has volunteered up to 10 hours a week at the ReStore in Bangor, quietly fixing any number of things.

Sales of donated items from the ReStore help to build, rehabilitate and repair safe, affordable homes in our community. While everyone who donates to the ReStore has the best intentions, some items need the "Jim touch." A loose table leg here or a broken spring there? Jim will take care of it if it can be fixed.

Jim is a Navy veteran and retired nurse of 28 years with Northern Light Health. A father of three and grandfather of five, he now enjoys spending time with his family, bicycling, cross-country skiing and woodworking. Jim likes seeing good furniture benefiting others rather than being thrown away, "I love giving old, well-made furniture new life."



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