

Habitat homes will be done almost on time

This week in Windsor, some 750 Habitat for Humanity volunteers, including The Star's Bill Taylor, are building 10 houses in five days for needy families. This is the fifth of six parts.

Team leader is everywhere doing everything as house rises

BY BILL TAYLOR
STAFF REPORTER

WINDSOR — Oh, all right, make that five and a half days.

The dedication ceremony will go ahead as planned this afternoon for the 10 families, 43 people in all, getting the keys to their new homes. But despite everyone's best efforts, some volunteers will be back on the site tomorrow to make sure the project is properly finished off.

As the work has become more finely detailed, the job has gone more slowly though that's not to say anybody has been goofing off.

'I didn't come in at 'Hammer 101''

Volunteers old enough — and in some cases hefty enough — to know better have been hauling themselves up and down ladders and scaffolding like teenagers all week.

As for the landscaping, one of the last big tasks, unrolling sod and putting it in place only looks easy.

It's a miserable, backbreaking procedure. Anyone who arrived at the site with a manicure will be leaving without one.

Mary Kay McKenzie, in her cutoff jeans, orange team-leader's hard hat and a bottomless tool belt that seems to hold one of everything, is everywhere at once on the house she's working on.

One minute she's in the basement, the next she's on the roof. There's nothing she can't do, or teach a beginner to do, and when McKenzie speaks all the guys listen.

As well as doing this as a volunteer, she must do it for a living, right? That's what everyone assumes.

She laughs. "I teach calculus at the University of Missouri. And I'm a nun."

"The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. Our mission is to make the love of Christ real in the world by promoting human dignity. There's no better way than by providing housing." A pause. "Of course, my students think this is kinda weird."

McKenzie, 60, has worked on a dozen Habitat for Humanity "blitz builds," a total of about 20 houses. She's house leader of the "women's build" in St. Louis.



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VETERAN VOLUNTEER: Mary Kay McKenzie, a math professor and nun, is a team leader for the Habitat construction project. She has helped out on 18 other projects.

"It's organized and led by women," she explains. "We let men work for us but they can't be bosses."

"So, no, I'm not construction trained. I'm Habitat trained."

"But I didn't come in at 'Hammer 101' level. Since I

was just so big, I've loved to play with tools."

"At the end of every day this week, I've said, 'Thank you for letting me play with my tools

and not have to apologize to anyone.'"

Nothing's been slowing her down. Not even her arthritis has kept her off the ladders.

"But I do wish sometimes that I could trade in my knees!"

Tomorrow: The finishing touches.