



Habitat
for Humanity®
of Otsego County

HABITAT HAPPENINGS

OUR SEASONAL NEWSLETTER

607-432-7874

403-B Chestnut Street, Oneonta, NY 13820

HabitatOtsego.org

BUILDING SIMPLE, DECENT HOMES SINCE 1989

SPRING 2022

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy Spring to everyone.

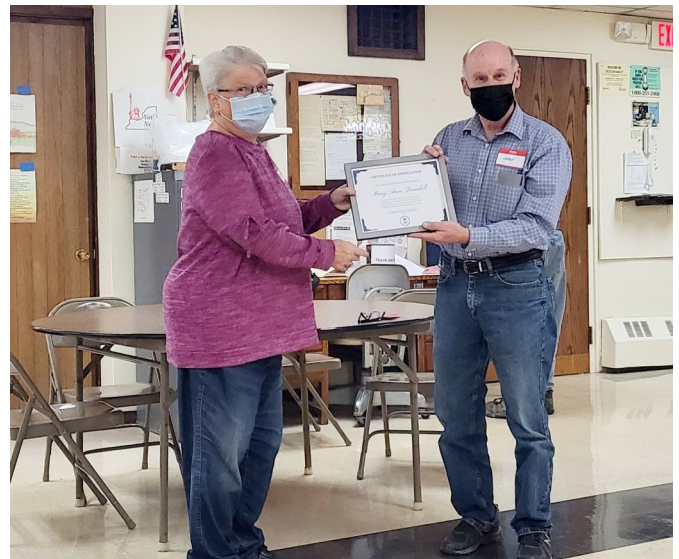
Of course, I'm conveniently forgetting the heavy winter-like snow that fell not too long ago and brought widespread power outages. But now that's just a distant memory as the weather warms and the sounds of Habitat house construction fill the air. If you wish to hear those magical sounds yourself, we always welcome new building volunteers to our building site on McFarland Road, just off route 205 in the Town of Oneonta. We work on Thursdays and Saturdays, 8:30 to 4 but we don't punch a clock and if you can work for only a few hours, that's fine. We have volunteers that only work Saturday. We're flexible! Call us at (607) 432-7874 or email us at HabitatOtsego@gmail.com. If you can't work construction, we have other important jobs you could do. You could be a big-shot member of the Board of Directors! Why not? Just ask us about it.

This past December, at our annual Retreat, we recognized and thanked our former President, Mary Ann Dowdell. We gave her a plaque and gift cards to her favorite coffee and book shops. Mary Ann did a wonderful job running our organization for the last six years. She continues to serve Habitat with her committee work and maybe when her "sabbatical" year is through, we can convince her to rejoin the Board of Directors. Nobody knows the job better than her.

On another happy note, in March we had not one but TWO partner families finish paying off their mortgages! Dallas and Patricia Blanchard were presented with their mortgage discharge papers, abstract, and property deed at our April 5 Board of Directors meeting. Lois Owens-Newell couldn't

make the meeting but Mary Ann Dowdell and I delivered her papers to her the next day at her place of business which happens to be her Habitat home. I don't know if either family burned their mortgages and I don't recommend that but they deserve our most enthusiastic congratulations on successful completion of this long journey to home ownership.

—
Jerry Blechman, HFHOC Board President



Mary Ann Dowdell accepts a certificate and gift from Jerry Blechman at the Dec. 2021 board retreat thanking her for her service as board president for six years.

PARTNER FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

Haile -Tewolde Family Realizes American Dream Through Partnership

Kbra Tewolde and her husband Tesfay Haile immigrated to Oneonta, NY from Eritrea in eastern Africa in 1996. The family began partnering with HFHOC around 2003, closed on their home in 2005 and paid it off in 2021. Sadly, Tesfay passed away before the family closed on their house, but the family kept working and have been an exemplary partner family ever since Tesfay and Kbra had six children in total, and Kbra and her oldest son, Fray, shared the story of their partnership journey and how they say partnering with Habitat played a key role in the family's well-being and happiness.

Prior to immigrating, Tesfay had to apply for a lottery visa to move to the United States. Out of 50,000 applicants, the Haile-Tewolde family was one of just 5,000 who were chosen. Kbra and Tesfay made a tough decision and moved their family to escape turmoil and poverty in their home country.

"Oneonta was really good to us. From the minute we moved here, we were welcomed with open arms, but we still had to work hard," said Fray.

When they first arrived in Oneonta, the family rented and moved a lot, which was difficult with a family of eight. Money was tight, but there was plenty of love to go around. Around 2002, someone at the elementary school where the kids were attending informed Kbra and Tesfay about Habitat for Humanity and how it helps families with lower incomes purchase their own homes.

Kbra and Tesfay decided to apply and looked forward to no longer having to worry about a safe, affordable place to live and were grateful to Habitat for the support in achieving the American dream of owning a home and property to support their family.

"My Dad was one of the most positive, hardworking people," Fray said. "Even before we had a car, he would run to work, but it didn't bother him."

Shortly after they started the partner process, Tesfay was diagnosed with cancer. But that didn't slow the family down. Going to the job site gave Tesfay something to look forward to.

"While dad was sick, we were worried and stressed, but now we had this dream within reach," recalled Fray. "Building the house eased the experience because of the

positive distraction. We knew he was in pain, but he had so much joy in not only building the house, but building something to leave behind for his family."



Kbra Tewolde (left) and her oldest son, Fray Haile (center) with Dennis Fowler (second to left), Emery (second to right) and Nancy Herman (right) in July 2021.

Fray was 24 when the family started to build the house, in his third year of college at the time. After his dad passed, he wanted to be a good role model for his younger siblings and reflected on how partnering with Habitat and owning the home helped the family endure their loss with more peace.

"When you have a foundation you can call home, it makes your life less stressful. Everything that warms your heart and the love of your family is home, but when you actually have a house that you own—especially one that you helped build—helped us to know we didn't have to worry and could focus on our lives, and one another" Fray said.

Ann Stein was the sponsor for the Haile-Tewolde family and she would come to their apartment every Saturday to pick everyone up to go to the worksite. Fray told us that working with Habitat was low-stress compared to purchasing a home the traditional way.

"There is something extra-special about putting our sweat and work into the house. Especially since there were volunteers and other partner families around us—it felt like we were a part of a team,. No one was making a commission off of us," said Fray. "The people at HFHOC are some of the most welcoming, happiest, and loving people. It is amazing to know someone wants you to succeed and for your family to keep moving forward. We had people to ask questions to and were real life savers during the process."

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All of Kbra and Tesfay's children went on to college and graduated and are now working in steady careers in New York and up and down the east coast. Kbra told us that simple things like no longer having to leave a car on the street, having a yard for the kids to play in, and living close enough that they could walk to elementary school enhanced and improved their lives beyond measure.

When asked if they had any advice for people considering partnering with Habitat, Fray said "Do it! Sometimes it is hard to know, but there are people out there who genuinely want to help others. These are the people at HFHOC."

The family paid off their mortgage in just 16 years and joined us at a board meeting in 2021 to receive their final paperwork and a hearty congratulations for their resilience and hard work.

Fray left us with one final thought about his family's experience "Habitat stretched out their hand for us and we grabbed it and still haven't let go! This has been a dream come true."

BUILDING UPDATE

2022 Off to a Strong Start

Our first day of work for the 2022 season was March 24 and we picked up right where we left off with painting, trim, and woodwork in Lot number 4 at McFarland Meadows. Lots of other finish work is being done including shelving, lighting, cabinetry and more.

The draft house plans are completed and are in the process of being submitted for the building permit. We are always looking for help at the job site! We are working on Thursdays and Saturdays again this season. If you or someone you know is interested in helping us build, let us know at HabitatOtsego@gmail.com.

FUNDS SENT TO UKRAINE

Assistance to Those in Need of Shelter Abroad

The HFHOC Board of Directors voted to send \$3,750 to Habitat International to support refugees affected by the war in Ukraine. Habitat International is responding to refugee communities in Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia and has made hotel accommodations for more than 1,000 refugees and has distributed 3,000 emergency travel kits.

IN MEMORIAM

Emery Herman

Long time volunteer and former board member, Emery Herman passed away on Feb. 26, 2022. Emery was devoted to Habitat and participated in the construction of 27 houses in Otsego County.



He contributed on the job site, sponsored partner families, and hosted a fundraiser for HFHOC each year by taking donations for people to park on his Cooperstown property during the National Baseball Hall of Fame's induction weekend. Emery even participated in a Jimmy Carter Work Project in his hometown of LaGrange, Georgia.

Emery's selflessness and sense of humor will always be remembered and we are grateful he dedicated part of his life to our organization.



The last of the siding going up on lot #4 at McFarland Meadows just before we finished work in fall 2021.



HABITAT HAPPENINGS

SPRING 2022

APPLICATIONS OPEN

Seeking New Partners Interested in Homeownership

We are seeking applicants for potential homeowners who are interested in our help. Anyone who has lived or worked in Otsego County for the past year and who currently lives in unsuitable, unsafe, unsanitary, overcrowded, temporary, or unaffordable housing is encouraged to apply. Applicants should have a sustainable income, but may be unable to secure a conventional mortgage. A willingness to work with Habitat by volunteering time to the building process is also required.

The application for interested families is open until May 31, 2022

The applications and additional information can be obtained on the Habitat for Humanity Otsego County website (HabitatOtsego.org), calling the office at 607-432-7874, by emailing HabitatOtsego@gmail.com, or via a written request to 403B Chestnut St., Oneonta NY 13820.

Applicants who are selected to partner with HFHOC will be assisted in completing the steps in purchasing a home, including the application for a low-interest mortgage.

Local volunteers provide the majority of labor, so our homes are sold to partner families at extremely attractive prices! It takes about two years from the time an applicant is accepted to the home's completion. This allows time for partner families to prepare for homeownership and to complete required homeownership education, as well as time for a house to be built.

Do you know someone who might be a good candidate for partnership? Please tell them to reach out!

HFHOC's Homeowner Support Committee act as mentors throughout the entire process. Members of the Family Support or Building Committees are happy to answer questions about the houses or partnership process. Reach out to us using the contact information to the left.