

Habitat looking to raise profile

BY JILLIAN AUSTIN

To jump-start fundraising efforts, Habitat for Humanity Manitoba has hired a full-time paid professional to work out of the Brandon chapter.

“They were having trouble fundraising within the volunteer community, so we decided as an affiliate that we would invest in the community,” said Michelle Pereira, vice-president of marketing, communications and philanthropy.

Longtime fundraiser Margaret Schonewille will take on the role Feb. 29, and will work at the ReStore office.

“Our intention is to raise the profile of the Brandon chapter,” Pereira said. “We think that having someone in the community who has roots in the community is going to benefit us as an organization and help us help more families that need affordable housing.”

Schonewille has 20 years of fundraising experience and currently sits on the board for the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Through previous work with Brandon non-profit organizations, Schonewille said she has gotten to know many people, clubs and community groups, but is always looking to meet more.

“If anyone wants someone to come and speak and share about Habitat at their group, we’re really happy to do that,” she said.

Schonewille said she plans to work closely with the volunteers in her fundraising efforts.

“It’s all of us working together that’s going to make us stronger,” she said.

Habitat was reintroduced to Brandon in 2013, as part of Habitat for Humanity Manitoba. The previous Habitat Brandon office was closed in 2012 after the organization’s national office claimed it didn’t meet operating standards.

There are new standards in place and while the Winnipeg office oversees the operation, the local chapter remains independent in terms of family selection, fundraising, volunteers, construction, trades and building crews.

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A crew works on a home for the Virden chapter of Habitat for Humanity. The home was recently completed, and the Samson family moved in last month. (Photo courtesy Vaughn Bender)

» ‘If we don’t raise funds, we can’t build houses’

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“Fundraising is actually an essential part of all the chapter structures. Obviously, if we don’t raise funds, we can’t build houses, so Margaret’s role is going to be critically important,” said Brandon Habitat chair Rick Wells.

The local chapter has been busy since its reopening, working on its ambitious goal of building 19 new homes in Brandon’s east end. The first home is ready for a family, and there will be a key ceremony on Feb. 19 at the home in the 700 block of Percy Street.

The second home was built by Green Acres Colony in conjunction with other Hutterite colonies, and will be moved onto the foundation. This possession is scheduled for late spring.

The City of Brandon donated a lot located at 255 Frederick St., with construction beginning in spring 2016. According to the organization, plans are being finalized and it is hopeful that the possession date will be late 2016 or early 2017.

Assiniboine Community College has almost completed the second home it is building and will be moved onto Percy Street before the end of the school year. Construction is well underway, with possession of the home slated for late 2016 early 2017.

The Brandon chapter is actively recruiting volunteer community leaders to join the committee.

“This organization offers a hand up to low-income families to realize the pride of homeownership and will provide their family, especially the children a more stable future,” Pereira said.

Habitat homes are for low-



Habitat for Humanity volunteers lay flooring in the recently completed Virden home. (Photo courtesy Vaughn Bender)

income people who are unable to secure a down payment or a traditional loan. There is an extensive interview process before an applicant is chosen. Part of the program is “sweat equity,” which means families volunteer time to help build the home.

Habitat is hoping to spread the word about the local ReStore, located at 630 Rosser Ave. The store just celebrated its one-year anniversary.

“If you are renovating, getting ready to spring clean your home, the ReStore is a great place to donate unwanted goods,” Pereira said.

Meanwhile, the Virden

chapter of Habitat for Humanity recently completed its first build since 2011. A key ceremony was held last month for Marissa and Cyrel Samson, along with their two children, aged two years and three weeks.

“They came into partnership with Habitat in January 2015 with the aspirations of owning their first home. After aggressively completing 500 hours of sweat equity, (this normally takes 18 months) they purchased their home at fair-market value,” according to Pereira.

Karen McKinnon, chair of the Virden Habitat chapter, said it took a dedicated group of

approximately 12 volunteers to complete the build.

“It was really quite wonderful,” she said, adding the basement was dug mid-September and the project was finished the first week of January.

“Habitat is a heartwarming organization and it makes you feel good to do something like that for somebody.”

Several other Westman communities have Habitat projects underway, including Shoal Lake. The chapter is looking for a new partner family interested in owning their first home, as the selected family had to withdraw for “personal reasons.”

If there are low-income families in the area who work full-time and have children, they are encouraged to call Steve Krahn of Habitat for Humanity Manitoba at 204-235-2187.

In Killarney, the first Habitat home was completed last year. Martin and Melissa Gervais moved into the home in February 2015. Two lots have been donated to the cause by Bill and Marianne Hildebrandt. According to Pereira, they are hoping to build in 2017, but will be dependent on fundraising.

The Asessippi-Parkland chapter completed its first build in the fall of 2015. Christine Diores, a single mother of three, purchased the home in Russell last October.

“She is an animal health technologist, originally from the Philippines,” according to Pereira. “The family is involved in the community and Christine volunteers in the community. She is seen as someone with a social conscience, which lends itself to being a good ambassador for Habitat.”

» jaustin@brandonsun.com
» Twitter: @jillianaustin