



The Prez Says

March 2015

The latest news and commentary

Construction Update

The weather gods, if you haven't noticed, have been pretty tough these past few months with snow, ice, cold and rain, lots of rain! Under normal circumstances the construction guys and gals tough it out, dress in layers, take a periodic break and warm their hands over a heater when their fingers start to tingle or my favorite warm-up technique, stand in front of the heater and turn slowly like meat on a rotisserie!

But freezing and wet weather especially play havoc on our contractors who pour footings, build our foundations and put in our driveways and boy, has the weather slowed them, and us, down. But I'm happy to report that things are finally starting to move forward. The footings have been poured at our Pump House site and hopefully with a few days of good weather, the foundation will be built. We'll go like gangbusters once the foundation is complete.

Meanwhile, over at our Butler School Road site, a paved road, gravel driveways and culverts are in. Grading of this site is pretty much complete and heck, there's even grass growing. At last count there were nine homes to be built. A very special thanks to Board member Ed Nichols, a.k.a. Guido, and Phil Tidd, Guido's sidekick, for pushing this project through the state and local permitting process and staying on top of our engineering consultants.

Pray for good weather, and lots of it!

New Safety Shoe Program

During our safety training over these past few months, several of you suggested that we look into a program that would help reimburse volunteers for the purchase of safety shoes. Well, we looked into it as promised and I am pleased to announce that the Board has approved a new safety shoe reimbursement program. In short, we'll reimburse you up to \$65 towards the purchase of safety shoes (safety boots and safety sneakers too) once every three years if you work in construction, landscaping, truck ops or in retail and you are involved in moving heavy items such as furniture, appliances, etc. You can purchase safety shoes and sneakers for as little as \$35 at Walmart and they've come a long way from the heavy safety boots of twenty years ago. You should have received a copy of the policy governing this new program along with a reimbursement form via email. There's some fine print about what we'll cover so be certain to read up on the program before you head out to the store. Protect your toes, get safety shoes and wear them!

Reaching Out

One of the things I love to do (weather permitting) is get on my motorcycle and explore the back roads of Oconee County. We live in a beautiful area but what always strikes me is the poverty and substandard housing that abounds and stands in stark contrast to the beautiful and comfortable homes that most of us own. Many of the folks who live in this housing are renters and they pay some pretty stiff rent (more than our typical mortgage payment) to their landlords. During my brief stint as an EMT in Oconee County, I responded to my share of singlewides with holes in the floor, missing windows, faulty heating systems and leaking roofs. The folks often apologized and explained they were waiting for their landlord to fix whatever was broken or in need of repair.

So with these observations, I've often wondered why we don't have more applicants for Habitat homes. We do get applications but unfortunately, many of the folks have poor credit histories and unpaid debts that disqualify them from further consideration. Many folks I've talked to believe that we "give away" our houses and with that stubborn Southern pride proclaim they don't take handouts and "I take care of my own."

We need to aggressively reach out to this population of renters who, with a little guidance, might become Habitat homeowners. We've relied on word-of-mouth, mostly through churches. It's a numbers game; the more applications we receive, the more likely we are to find qualified applicants. I should mention that finding qualified applicants is a common problem experienced by many Habitat affiliates.

So with all of this in mind, we're going to undertake a major effort to get the word out and hopefully, bring in more applications. Dottie Madden (Chair, Family Selection Committee), Frank Lewis (2nd VP and marketing guru in his former life) and yours truly are laying out a long-term marketing plan, beginning with a focus group of Habitat homeowners, to understand their experiences with the application process and eventual homeownership. We want to find out how we can do a better job, how we can bring in more applications, how we can get our story out. There are no simple fixes, no single "mailings", and no gimmicks. It's a long-term process that will involve the way we communicate with the people of Oconee County, how we present ourselves, how we reach our target audience and bring more qualified applicants to the table.

There are a whole host of studies that show that homeownership results in fewer lost school days, fewer lost workdays, improved academic performance and improved family relationships. We just don't just build homes, we really do change lives, we help people get a leg up and give families a chance to improve and make things better for themselves and their kids! We need to reach out! If you have any thoughts, please drop me a line.

Be Safe,

Mike Stevenson

(631) 560-2407

MSteve997@gmail.com