



## The House that APRO Built

By Kelli Montgomery

It took about eight days, 2,000 nails, six buckets of paint, 1,056 bottles of water, 970 pounds of ice, an assortment of building materials and a birthday cake to make someone's dream come true. Rosa Sanchez, a laundry-room attendant for the past 15 years at Tarlton Textile Services, has earned the reputation as a hard-working, dependable person, raising a family

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### Eight days a week: The blitz, day by day

#### Day one

10 a.m.-7:30 p.m.

Volunteers and crew members set the trusses and support beams for the trusses and routed electrical wires. The day was cut short due to pending thunderstorms.

#### Day two

7 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

The day began in a downpour. Volunteers drilled holes in the floorboards to drain collecting water from the house. As the rains subsided, participants started roof work, secured electrical wiring, attached support braces to trusses, dug plumbing canals, started siding and painting.

#### Day three

6:45 a.m.-8 p.m.

Volunteers finished the roof, installed the attic stairs and exterior doors, installed radiant-cooling baring for insulation, continued electrical wiring, began porch, started plumbing, installed air conditioning, finished siding, installed windows and secured the ventilation system.

#### Day four

7 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

Participants drywalled the ceiling, installed insulation, finished plumbing, installed trim on windows, painted and caulked trim and battens, painted and installed underpinning and headboards and hung drywall into the late evening.

#### Day five

7 a.m.-7 p.m.

Crew members taped and floated, textured walls and installed battens.

#### Day six

7 a.m.-7 p.m.

Workers painted interior, painted and puttied trim and continued the porch.

#### Day seven

7 a.m.-7 p.m.

Volunteers caulked door frames and windows, retouched painting and primed and painted interior trim.

#### Day eight

7 a.m.-4 p.m.

The crew finished the porch, installed cabinets, installed floor supports, installed interior trim, painted interior doors, hung closet shelves and rods and honored volunteers at a congratulatory APRO/Habitat ceremony.

times without such basic necessities as safety locks, working lights or even running water. Rampant crime and drug abuse in previous neighborhoods have made raising a family in a safe environment increasingly difficult.

That's all about to change, however, thanks in part to the ongoing community relations program between the Association of Progressive Rental Organizations and Habitat for Humanity.

In July, Sanchez, her two children and two grandchildren, will unlock the doors to their brand new four-bedroom home located at 605 Delmar in Austin, TX. For the first time, Sanchez and her family members will have their own bedrooms, along with reliable plumbing and electricity, a big yard and the pride of home ownership. In many ways, the

house is not only the manifestation of a dream by the Sanchez family, but also by the volunteers and members of the industry who were able to turn a good idea on paper into a tangible, three-dimensional structure in central Austin.

The rental-purchase industry is proud to call the Sanchez family home, "the house that APRO built."

"Hopefully we can make the life of someone else a little better," says Rent-One dealer Larry Carrico of Illinois, who brought a team of six workers to Austin for several days to help with the build. "There seems to be a lot of pride with someone owning their own house and APRO was kind enough to donate all the money. We've got a lot of volunteers and that's what it's all

## Habitat for your Humanity

By Richard May

Every bone in my body aches. I helped my father with construction projects as a child, but have never worked on a construction build for eight consecutive 12-hour days in heat averaging 95 degrees with similar humidity levels. It was the hardest work I've ever done. I cursed the house, the tools and the materials countless times. I smashed my thumb, gashed my leg, bashed my head - twice - sprained my hand and danced dangerously close to heat exhaustion and, surprisingly, I look forward to doing it again. Why? Let me try to explain.

First, the obvious. Habitat For Humanity is about empowerment, not charity. It is incumbent for all of us to help others help themselves so they too may fulfill dreams, provide for their families and make their own contributions to society. The parallels between Habitat For Humanity and the rent-to-own industry are uncanny in the sense that both help families gain footholds in their lives so they can move forward. After coordinating APRO's Home Together campaign for three years, the value of Habitat For Humanity and the industry's participation is an easy sell.

Building a house, on the other hand, was a bit more difficult to sell, considering I have two left feet and have trouble hanging up a wall calendar. But Gary Romine, who spearheaded "The House that APRO Built," told me to trust him and after the build was complete, I would understand. Understanding is a powerful experience.

By the fourth day of the build, I began to look at the house from an entirely different perspective. The actual construction transcended way beyond the building. The house became a symbol of self-fulfillment. This build was not just the apparent public relations success for the industry, but also personal fulfillment for every volunteer who sacrificed his or her body upon this house.

As human beings, we all must act out our emotions upon some thing, some one or some instance, in hopes of personal fulfillment. We act out our emotions upon traffic, co-workers, television and our loved ones.

As for the hundreds of volunteers who participated in the build, the construction defined their individual motivations. It might have been a simple goal such as that of Mike and Bill from Indiana who volunteered partly because they wanted to check out Austin's live music scene. Several of Baber's employees used the house as a "break" from their 60-hour work weeks and a change of scenery from their stores. John from Louisiana used the house to demonstrate his loyalty and gratitude to Jimmy Strong for his long-term employment at Easy Way.

As for me, my motivation was to face my fears in an area in which I was ignorant. Before the build, if I happened upon construction even from afar, I would shudder, turn the opposite way and thank God that someone else was doing it. Not because of the hard labor, but because I knew nothing about it. We fear what we do not know and since I barely knew what a hammer was before the build, I was a frightened man. After the build, though, I now know the difference between a drywall hammer and a carpenter's hammer. I now feel a pride and a sense of satisfaction from my discovery of abilities, skills and muscles I never thought I had. An area so foreign before became conquered territory afterwards and I want more. The house became the springboard from which to face my fears, discover a new confidence and display an untapped pride. The selfless volunteering evolved quickly into a selfish quest for inner-discovery.

This lesson that I learned is the reason why Habitat For Humanity is so successful. It is the reason HFH has built 100,000 homes in the world and has more than 1,200 affiliates. It is because HFH creates a relationship of give and take. Successful relationships are those in which both parties benefit. If volunteers only gave, Habitat would have died years ago. But the meaning of Habitat goes beyond simple, decent, affordable housing. It offers a foundation for individual transformation.

It is the reason why our site leader, Sam Garner, spent 104 hours on this build without a single dime coming to him. Sam has a selfish reason to take a bit of his own humanity home with him and feel proud and better about himself and the world in which he lives. It is the reason why our weekend site leader, Lisa, spends her free time working on houses because she hones construction skills and techniques that further her life ambitions to be a future home builder. It is the reason why Gary and Kathy Romine took eight days off to work on a house because they feel lucky in the life they have built and want to help others experience the same.

While each individual supposedly gave, each individual was really taking. Taking in a "selfish" way that benefits all. Talk about the easiest sell in the world. What you put in the build is what you get out of it. Habitat offers the houses and the vehicle for millions of volunteers to build their own meaning and, in the meantime, a house gets built for a deserving family. What a deal. I now understand the real power and depth of Habitat For Humanity because for those of you who volunteered, it really means Habitat for your own humanity.

about - people working together for a common cause," he says.

The house is the result of a 'blitz' build, an eight-day expedited build in June involving the family, APRO dealers, volunteers, the Casa VerdŽ kids and the Habitat for Humanity crew working 10 to 14 hours per day to complete the project. Sanchez and family members donated 400 hours of their own "sweat equity" toward their home and other Habitat houses in order to qualify for the program. Sanchez is also required to pay a zero-percent interest

loan that helps fund other Habitat houses.

The purpose of Habitat for Humanity is to eliminate poverty housing by providing decent, affordable houses within each community.

APRO Executive Director Bill Keese, who worked at the site each day of the build, says the Habitat project provides a team building process by which rental dealers and employees are able to give back to people who are less fortunate.

"We have rental dealers from across the country volunteering their time and their money to come to Austin to work on this build," says Keese.

"The APRO Habitat home is a culmination of many years of trying to pull this industry together, not only for legislative reasons, but also to reach out in the communities where we do business and give back to these communities in a meaningful way," says Keese. In 1998, for example, rental dealers donated 100 refrigerators and stoves to the Jimmy Carter/Habitat for Humanity Build in Houston and participated in the First Ladies Build nationwide. This year, APRO decided to take its participation one step further by donating \$55,000 to fully fund the Sanchez house and supplying Habitat for Humanity with about 20 to 30 rental dealers and employees to work each day of the week during the "blitz" build.

While it's almost impossible to explain the feelings of accomplishment of the individual participants of this project, it's interesting to find a general consensus among the cast of volunteers who ran the gamut in age, skill level and purpose for being there. Strangely enough, the participants, who sustained unrelenting, exhausting hours in 95-degree Texas heat and who couldn't even remember what day it was most of the time, said they'd do it again in a heartbeat.

"I'm tired and I'm worn out, but I am glad to be here and I'll do it again," says rent-to-own consultant Lindsey Semon, who could always be spotted on the site donning his characteristic shark-fin cap. Among other things, Semon headed the electrical work at the site, set up the tents each day and made sure all the volunteers stayed hydrated throughout the build. "It's hard work but it's a lot of fun. You make a lot of friends and learn some new skills," he says.

Full-of-Pep Appliance District Manager Mike Goodin of Indiana, a die-hard music fan, thought he might actually get to experience some Austin music during his trip, but instead ended up working at the Habitat site the entire time. Nonetheless, he says he felt totally fulfilled at the end of each day.

"It's an experience I've never had in my life. I didn't know what to expect, but I learned a lot, doing things I never thought I could possibly do," he says. "It sounds like a lot of hard work, but once you get in there and start working with volunteers and crew members of Habitat, it's not as bad as it seems. As it progresses, you see your work could actually become a house and you feel quite good about yourself."

Despite what appeared to be seemingly endless days at time, volunteers for this project worked as a team, doing whatever needed to be done without complaining about the tasks they'd been assigned, the mistakes

they had to correct or the injuries they had sustained. Everyone worked the 12-hour days with surprisingly high spirits despite fatigue, soreness and heat exhaustion.

Easy Way workers John Herlong and Rodney Smitherman, who turned 17 at the build, patiently hung the exterior doors four times before the task was complete. David P. David of Full-of-Pep - the chief indoor painter and plumbing assistant at the site - came to the build each day with an ice pack on his back, but still managed a full 12-hour shift every day. Shannon Strunk and 10 employees from Baber's Leasing in Mississippi and Louisiana, drove 800 miles to participate in two days of the project before returning home to work the rest of the week at their regular jobs. Kathy Romine of Show Me Rent-To-Own caringly puttied, painted and then applied a second coat of paint to the exterior walls and battens until the job was done right, while husband, Gary, who injured his arm on day three lifting drywall, put in more hours and completed more tasks than imaginable during the eight-day build.

"This group seems to have a higher need and desire to be here," says Sam Garner, Austin's Habitat for Humanity site leader, who worked at the site on his day off simply because he enjoyed working with the APRO crew so much. "It's the best group I've ever worked with. I had a blast working with you guys."

Shawn Hohnstreiter, Habitat staff project manager, reiterated that point, saying that the exceptional attitude and experience of the crew members eased the hectic building schedule. "The APRO build has gone great. We had a lot of experience. The crews made the week enjoyable for how many hours we put in. There was great leadership and experience from within that made my job really easy," he says. Hohnstreiter and several volunteers who worked the full eight days contributed close to 100 hours of labor during the week.

In the end, people were tired, sore and ready to leave the Texas heat, but they shared an experience that will mean something to them and the Sanchez family for the rest of their lives. For whatever personal reasons, they built a house from the ground up in eight days for a family in need.

"It's been a good, hard, long week. It's been a lot of fun watching this thing go from start to finish," says Romine, who along with wife Kathy, received the "MVP" award for their tireless and valuable efforts throughout the build. Romine, who has participated in several projects such as this one, says this experience offers a better appreciation of his industry.

"If a person goes their whole life without giving back to someone else, they don't fully enjoy their life," says Romine. "And this has been a great opportunity as a group to come in and do a major project. I'm sure a lot of people have had small contributions they've made, but when you put on an effort like this to build a full house, you've made a tremendous impact."

Romine says he hopes APRO and the industry will continue with similar

<b>APRO Built</b>
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<b>Rent One</b>
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projects in the future.

"Don't let the chain of love end with this project. Continue on. Until you help someone else, you can't fully appreciate the help you've been given in your own past," says Romine.

The Sanchez family should be moving into their new Austin home in late July or early August.

Kelli Montgomery is a freelance writer living in Austin, TX.