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Greater Springfield
Habitat
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NEWS

April 2021



AmeriCorps NCCC North Central Region Maple 4 team on April 6 helped build a stockade fence in the Springfield backyard of a partner family.

AmeriCorps Maple 4 team arrives for volunteer opportunity

Prior to their April 3 arrival, several members of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corp (NCCC) North Central Region Maple 4 team knew nothing about Western Massachusetts. Now here, they will experience a crash course in not only the towns of Hampden County, but the mission of Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH).

The purpose of the national service program is to empower youths between the ages of 18 and 26 to live and work in the community. The team will travel throughout the United States for 10 months and volunteer with a variety of nonprofit organizations. The stay with GSHFH is the team's

first assignment. Team members hail from Texas, Mississippi, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Maine, and will primarily work on build sites assisting the GSHFH construction crew and at the ReStore, in Westfield, during their three-and-a-half-week stay. For many members of the Maple 4 team, the NCCC experience is helping them figure out what they may want to pursue as a career.

"It's a good fit," said Lauren Rawlins of Georgetown, Texas, a city 25 miles north of Austin. "It'll give me leadership skills, new experiences outside of an office/administration role, and a wider

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range of new skills.” Lauren is a 23-year-old graduate of San Antonio’s Trinity University. She said after graduating with a major in English and a minor in German studies, she wasn’t sure what path to follow next. She thought about graduate school, but also thought that needed more consideration and research.

Instead of rushing into something, she wanted to try something different, something that made her more marketable when she entered the workforce. NCCC checked those boxes.

Hazel Miller agreed. The 20-year-old from Evanston, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, said she is very excited for the opportunity to learn a variety of skills. Habitat, in particular, is an organization that’s near and dear to

“They’re very eager to jump in where help is needed.”

- Sheri Green
GSHFH
Construction manager

her heart. Hazel said while growing up, there were times when her lower middle-class family struggled to pay bills. To now volunteer for an organization that helps ease that burden is very important to her.

Taylor Rabalais, a 21-year-old from Bay St. Louis, a Mississippi Gulf Coast city, said she heard about AmeriCorps from her aunt who works

for a Habitat affiliate. Prior to joining Maple 4, Taylor participated in the AmeriCorps NCCC sister opportunity, FEMA Corps. For 10 months participants travel the US as part of a team, but instead of doing community service projects, they learn about disaster response, recovery efforts, and long-term recovery activities within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Taylor said she was excited about the Maple 4 team because it gives her a different perspective and she’s entertaining the idea of college or a technical school when she returns to Mississippi. She may even consider a career in construction.

“I want to learn building skills and work

outside. I like doing things that are hands-on,” she said. “I’m not good in an office.”

Sheri L. Green, GSHFH Construction manager, said she’s excited to work with the Maple 4 group.

“They get along well, have trust in each other, and are willing to mix it up by trying new things and work in different groups and pairs,” she said. “They’re very eager to jump in where help is needed.”

In addition to volunteering, the Maple 4 team’s days also include meals together, structured group physical training, and work for their individual specialty roles. Each member of the group has a job and they include reaching out to local media outlets to educate them on NCCC or service learning initiatives, such as participating in reflections to better understand how their service impacts the communities they’re in. Their nights end with downtime.

The Maple 4 team will stay with GSHFH until April 29.



AmeriCorps NCCC North Central Region Maple 4 team member Kennedy Bryan on April 6 digs a hole for a fence post in the Springfield backyard of a partner family.

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SPOTLIGHT ON

John O'Farrell

GSHFH Fundraising and Volunteer Coordinator of Longmeadow, MA



How long have you been a GSHFH staff member? Eight months, but I've been involved in nonprofit organizations in various leadership roles for over 25 years.

What attracted you to this position and what do you hope to accomplish? The chance to make a positive difference in peoples' lives and to always leave things better than I found them.

What is your favorite ice cream topping? Sprinkles

What is the most interesting thing you see out of your office or kitchen window? The constant activity in the rail yard. Good news for me because I am avid trains fan.

Do you like going to the movies or do you prefer watching them at home? Depends on the movie. Some movies you just have to see in the theater to really appreciate, like *Star Wars*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *Harry Potter* for example.

CORNERSTONE COLUMN

by John O'Farrell
GSHFH Fundraising and Volunteer Coordinator

I recently had the pleasure of participating in my first home dedication ceremony. What an incredible day for our partner family and their four children. To see the joy on their faces as they walked through the door was such a magical moment and a true testament to why our work is so important.

What started as an empty lot now stands a home made possible by the collective efforts of our tireless volunteers and staff, dedicated community partners, and generous financial contributors, coming together to make a positive impact in the community.

Did you know each Habitat home costs approximately \$175,000 to build? There are so many ways that you can make an impact as well. Have you considered becoming a member of our Recurring Giving Club? For a small amount of just \$20 each week, you're yearly gift would add up to \$1,040 in support of GSHFH. Isn't it amazing how a small gift each week can have such a huge impact in support of our programs?

For more information on GSHFH and to join our Recurring Giving Club, please visit our website at habitatspringfield.org Thank you!



Righting the wrongs: dispelling 10 GSHFH myths

1: GSHFH gives away houses.

GSHFH does not give away homes. Habitat homes are not free. Partner families purchase their homes from GSHFH via an affordable mortgage that we help them to obtain. Partner families must also provide sweat equity on GSHFH projects and complete financial education classes. For more information, go to habitatspringfield.org/how-to-apply

2: Habitat is a government organization.

Contrary to popular belief, Habitat is not a part of the government, nor is it a government program. Habitat is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit charitable organization. The 501(c)(3) designation makes it recognizable as “tax exempt” by the IRS. With that said, GSHFH does apply for and receives grants, which empowers us to continue our mission, and all donations to us are tax exempt.

3: Habitat was founded by former President Jimmy Carter.

No. Habitat was founded by husband and wife duo Millard and Linda Fuller. Millard, a self-made millionaire by the age of 29, said his marriage, health, and personal integrity suffered as his business grew. He and his wife decided to sell their possessions and give away their money to the less fortunate. As they sought ways to redirect their intentions, the Fullers worked with a housing ministry to build simple housing for homeowners who wouldn't be able to afford a home through traditional means. In exchange, future homeowners helped construct the homes and paid for materials. The Fullers found

their calling and tested the model by moving into one such home. Several years later, in 1976, they laid the groundwork for what would become Habitat for Humanity.

Former President Jimmy Carter and former first lady Rosalynn Carter are volunteers. Their first interaction with Habitat happened in March 1984 when the couple participated at a build site in Americus, Georgia, the home of Habitat. They enjoyed the experience so much that six months later, the Carters led a Habitat for Humanity work group to New York to serve 19 families in need of safe, affordable housing. The Carters have since introduced the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project, a weeklong building blitz to benefit Habitat partner families.

4: Habitat houses reduce a neighborhood's property values.

Quite the contrary, affordable housing doesn't negatively affect a community's property values. Habitat homes are well-built and fit in with the rest of the neighborhood. In fact, if Habitat didn't build a home on the plot of land, there might not be any



A typical GSHFH house.

house there. Without any home, there wouldn't be a homeowner contributing taxes to the local economy or leading by example to show the positive impact a responsible homeowner family can have on a neighborhood. All Habitat homes are sold to partner families at fair market value and serve to uphold property values for every homeowner in the community. To meet our partner families, go to habitatspringfield.org/meet-our-families

5: Habitat homes are more expensive than rent.

The fiscal year 2021 fair market rent of a three-bedroom apartment in Springfield, Massachusetts, is \$1,404 a month. A four-bedroom apartment is \$1,648 a month, according to HUD's Office

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of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) Fiscal Year 2021 Final Fair Market Rents Documentation System. GSHFH builds three- and four-bedroom homes. The average habitat partner family pays \$800 per month which includes principal and escrow.

6: GSHFH only builds for young families.

Not true. GSHFH follows fair housing and lending policies and doesn't discriminate on the basis of age. At GSHFH, there are several families whose children are in high school or college. Many of our family partners are in their 40s and older when they are selected to the program.

7: GSHFH only builds in Springfield, MA.

No. Our name is “Greater Springfield” and we serve the 23 cities and towns of Hampden County. Our reach extends as far east as Holland and Brimfield. To the west, we reach Tolland, Blandford, and Chester. Our towns to the north include Montgomery, Westfield,

Holyoke, Chicopee, Ludlow, and Palmer. To the south along the Connecticut border, we reach Granville, Southwick, Agawam, Longmeadow, East Longmeadow, Hampden, Monson, and Wales. We have built the majority of our houses in Springfield, but are not limited only to the city. There are 16 Habitat affiliates across Massachusetts.

8: GSHFH only helps single mothers.

No. We have nearly as many two-parent families as we do single mothers and we have single fathers as well. We help those who qualify for our program and do not discriminate based on familial status, sex, gender, race, or religion. If you are interested in one of our programs, go to habitatspringfield.org/programs

9: If I have land, GSHFH will build me a house.

No. GSHFH will accept land donations, but cannot build any one person/family a specific house on a particular piece of property. That's not how our program works. GSHFH

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301 E. Main St,
Westfield, MA 01085
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Celebrate Earth Day

Join us in turning cans to cash! Drop off your clean aluminum cans (no plastic or glass bottles, please) at the GSHFH or ReStore location. Or, use one of our receptacles to collect cans in your office. For more info, call (413) 739-5503 or email support@habitatspringfield.org.

will select a location for future projects as sites become available. Once funding is in place, we open applications to anyone living or working in Hampden County that is interested in becoming a partner family. Applicants that meets all requirements and has the greatest need for safe, decent, affordable housing will be selected.

10: Only men can do construction with GSHFH and you have to have experience.

No. At GSHFH, both our construction manager and site supervisor roles are held by women – Sheri L. Green and Mary Melchisky, respectively. We invite any anyone that is 16 years of age or older interested in lending a hand to volunteer on our builds. No previous experience is required we will teach you what you need to know.