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## Women get together for Habitat for Humanity project in Lansing

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LANSING – It was raining, the sky was dark, but the pace was brisk and the mood bright Friday afternoon as volunteer construction workers finished putting together the walls of a Lansing home.

Just hours earlier, they had finished the trusses, and already they were nearing the end of the interior panels. The men watched from the side, wearing workboots and flannel but not building anything – it was the women who traded hammers and nails and black Sharpie markers, building walls at a rate so fast they almost ran out of lumber.

Friday marked the first Women Build Project for Habitat for Humanity in Tompkins and Cortland Counties, an initiative that calls on women in the community to build houses with the goal of getting children out of poverty. Women account for about 50 percent of Habitat's volunteer force nationally, according to the organization, but they are only 15 percent of volunteers actively doing construction.

Since 1991, Habitat has built 1,500 houses nationally through the project, and Christy Voytko, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Tompkins and Cortland Counties, said she thinks it will be a popular project in the area. According to the Census Bureau, more than 2,000 children live in poverty in Tompkins County alone.

"Women have the capability and determination necessary to build Habitat for Humanity Houses, Voytko said. "We are eager to bring this project to our community so women can address the problem of substandard housing in a concrete way and can become advocates for families to have safe and decent homes."

The home in Lansing will help Amber Little give her two sons Maleki, 6, and Maximus, 2, a house of their own. She walked through the site in work boots and an apron full of tools, pointing to the foundation of white concrete and drawing the blueprint in the air above it with her finger.

The boys will each get their own room, she said, and so will she. There will be a mud room, and a dining area, a kitchen and a living area. A shed already stands at the foot of the work area, which caused some confusion when the family first drove by the house."

"(Maleki) was so excited, he thought the shed was the house," Little said.

For her boys, especially Maleki, the home will provide some stability and peace from having to move from apartment to apartment. After moving out of her parents' house, Little said they moved into an apartment that was eventually found to have black mold, which made her sons very sick.

The new house won't have that problem. Little will buy the house through low payments on a zero-interest mortgage. She's also contributing 500 hours of "sweat equity" by working on the home alongside the volunteers. Some of those hours were being done on Friday.

Fifty others joined her throughout the day, from pairs of mothers and daughters, to local residents and college students.

Lansing resident Kim Grant said this was her first Habitat project -- and the idea of a women's build intrigued her.

"We're kicking butt," she said. "We can certainly keep up with the guys," she said.

Little said there were several benefits she and the other women have noticed about working with all women.

"We're organized, we're on time, when we say something we're doing it," she said, laughing. "We have it all together."

Cornell student Amelia Bezerra volunteered Friday with her sorority, Sigma Lambda Upsilon/Senoritas Latinas Unidas, and said building houses is not something many of her peers would think was needed in this area.

"It's nice to be able to go out and work in the community, and not just go to school here," she said. "It's nice to give back."

With 75 more volunteers expected Saturday, the house should be finished before the start of 2010.

For Little, that means a permanent home.

"It means everything ... it's amazing, to have a place for my boys to call home," she said. "It's hard for them, to move place to place. Now, we'll never have to move again."

## Additional Facts

### How to Help

- \* The women's build continues today at 100 Breed Road, Lansing.
  - \* For information, call 898-4148 or visit [www.tchabitat.com](http://www.tchabitat.com).
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