

# The ToolBox

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## Positive Results From A Dreadful Day

*By T. Peter Sullivan*

At least two positive things have developed for Habitat for Humanity Newark since the enemy attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. They include the building of the Ron Ruben Home and the soon-to-be-completed home honoring the Gardner Family.

The Ron Ruben home was completed on the first anniversary of the attack, September 11, 2002. The Ruben family and their friends worked tirelessly, giving their money, time, talents and labor to build the new home that is set to house the second HFHN Partner Family, Crystal Thomas and her three children.

The Gardner Family home will soon be completed on Fairmount Avenue. Jeffery Brian Gardner, an insurance executive at Marsh & McLennan Company worked in the World Trade Center, and died in the attacks. For several years prior, Jeff was an active volunteer at Habitat Newark and other Habitat projects throughout the world, including builds in Honduras and Brazil.

Jeff Gardner was a strong and unique volunteer for us, and one respected by all. "Jeff was an optimistic guy," says his sister Amy, "and was well-known for constantly saying; 'There are no bad days, only good days and great days.' He made the world a better place for many people."

In addition to what they have done for Habitat Newark, the Gardner family has also established a scholarship in Jeff's

*continued next page . . .*

### *Houses Built and Dedicated by*



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The ToolBox is published by Habitat for Humanity Newark, Inc., an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International. HFHI is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry that seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world, and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action. Habitat has built more than 200,000 houses around the world, providing some 1,000,000 people in more than 3,000 communities with safe, decent, affordable housing.

## A Letter From the Executive Director

*Dear Friends of Habitat Newark,*

### *Home for the Holidays . . .*

*This time last year I was six months into my work with Habitat Newark, but already deeply taken with the wonderful blessings of this organization's ministry that include the families who are in dire need of decent, affordable housing and the countless volunteers who combine their gifts of time, energy, skills and open-heartedness with that of the future homeowners.*

*What a tremendous gift Habitat has become—here in Newark and around the world—because it is a gift that “keeps on giving.” In 2005 we were in constant modes of work and prayer in our effort to complete a house on Fairmount Avenue so that the Sepulveda Family would be home for the holidays. Our physical labor and spiritual intercessions came through when two days before Christmas, we obtained a certificate of occupancy, though it was doubtful up until the last second.*

*This year, we are filled with overwhelming gratitude that five new families will soon move into their homes on Fairmount Avenue. We're working hard to get them in before Christmas, but we know that whether it happens then or a little later, we'll all be ever thankful.*

*Habitat for Humanity Newark is a gift that “keeps on giving” because it turns the dream of homeownership into reality and gives new homeowners opportunities to help build a wonderful place to live that they can feel safe in and most poignantly, to call their own. Indeed, it gives them the opportunity to create their own “holy-days” throughout the year as they gather at table in remembrance and thankfulness for what God has done in their lives.*

*Habitat Newark also provides a “home for the holidays” to each volunteer and contributor. This particular home is not a physical place but rather a place of spirit. Call it community service, or community giving, Habitat Newark offers a very practical idea that becomes an ideal place for our friends to find a “home” for their goodness, their generosity, their acts of kindness, and their selflessness. For volunteers, house sponsors, in-kind service and gift contributors, Habitat for Humanity becomes a gift that gives over and over again.*

*From all of us at Habitat Newark, we wish you a blessed and joyous holiday season, and thank you for your gracious support and participation in 2006.*

*Sincerely,*

*Hendricks S. Davis  
Executive Director*

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**Thank You!**

# A Big Surprise for Two Special Children

## A Partner Family Story: Carlos Rodriguez

By T. Peter Sullivan

Destiny (age 5) and Ricardo (age 6) Rodriguez have been living in their grandfather's basement for some time. Soon they will be moving into a brand new home, the first home they can call their own!

Their father, Carlos Rodriguez, has been working on the building of their new home, along with the homes of several other Partner Families since February '06, and decided it would be great for the kids if he kept it a big surprise. They will be moving into one of several homes under construction on Fairmount Avenue. Just imagine the looks on their faces when they find out what is going on!

One of only a couple of single fathers in the program, Carlos is a life-long resident of Newark. He attended Our Lady of Good Counsel elementary and high schools, and along with many local residents, laments the fact that the schools closed down a couple of years ago.

Carlos learned about Habitat Newark from his older brother, Edwin, who became a HFHN Partner several years ago. Carlos and his children have lived in a few places in Newark; most recently they have been renting a basement apartment from his father.

Carlos works for the County of Essex, as a personnel technician, and has worked primarily with other members of the department staff for the last three years.

Carlos is thrilled with the opportunity to be part of HFHN's program. "This is a great program, and a wonderful learning experience for me. I am happy to be able to work with and get to know so many generous hard-working people. I am delighted to be able to get to know my new neighbors. We've bonded so well, it is almost like my new friends and neighbors are part of our family. These are friendships we will enjoy for the rest of our lives," he said. ●



L to R: Mister Willie, Habitat Foreman, works with Carlos Rodriguez.

## Flying Deuces Volunteer



The Arnold Air Society is a group of young people dedicated to community service and affiliated with US Air Force ROTC program, and New Jersey Institute of Technology. From L to R: William Singer, Darwin Angeles, Kristofer Fernandez and Matt Jefferson.

name through Habitat International. You can learn more about the Jeffrey Brian Gardner Scholarship fund at [www.ourvoicestogether.org](http://www.ourvoicestogether.org).

Jeff's brother Eric is on the board of Our Voices Together.

Both of Jeffrey's parents were also active volunteers for HFHN. His mother, Eileen, passed away in 2004 and his father, David, passed away this year. Both volunteered with Habitat Newark and were dedicated supporters of the cause. The Gardners lived for over 40 years in Livingston. Eileen taught nursing at New Jersey City State University for over 25 years and earned her doctorate degree from Rutgers University. David, an avid music and opera lover, sang with the Masterwork Chorus.

Eileen appreciated Jeffrey's love of the Habitat programs and it was her idea to dedicate a home in his honor. Jeff's sister, Amy

Kassan, and brother Eric Gardner, followed through and provided the money and much effort to build the house to honor the memories of not only Jeffrey, but their parents as well.

Every year the family and their friends come to volunteer around Jeffrey's birthday and celebrate the event with a picnic in the Habitat Family Park. Soon the Gardner Family Home will stand and keep the memories alive of these three important people for many years to come.



*In celebration of the life of Jeffrey Gardner, friends and family have gathered to build since 2001. From L to R: Paul Vazques (brother-in-law), Rebecca Zummo, Amy Kassan (sister), Rosetta Hollis (HFHN Partner Family), Anthony Nittolo (dear friend of Jeff's), Eric Gardner (brother), Jef Forsberg, Michele Forsberg, Owen Burns (all dear friends of Jeff) and Patricia Kaufman (Jeff's Aunt).*

**For more information about how you can help to dedicate a home to a loved one, please call us at (973) 624-3330. ●**

## This Woman Found HFHN By Driving Around in Newark A Partner Family Story: Crystal Thomas

By T. Peter Sullivan



*Crystal Thomas (second from right) gets some help cleaning up the backyard of the home she will move into. Helping. (from L to R) regular volunteers RJ and Mary Lou Klein and neighbor Raul Cruz.*

Crystal Thomas has lived in Newark for over 20 years. She had never heard of Habitat Newark. Then one day, she was out driving around in some neighborhoods that were new to her. She saw a "bunch of people working on houses," so she parked the car and got out to learn more about what was going on.

Crystal says, "There were a number of people, all

happily working away with great enthusiasm. They were building a house, and I immediately wanted to be part of what was going on. So I asked a few questions and talked to some of the people working there." Her inquiring mind really paid off.

Soon, she applied to the Partner Family program and this fall, Crystal and her three children moved into the Ron Ruben house that was originally dedicated in 2002 and was the home of another Partner Family who moved out of town this past year. Habitat volunteers have completely updated the home, appliances and property so it is just like new, and when city inspections are complete, it will be ready for her family to move in.

It does not take long when listening to Crystal to understand that she is a "people person." She is concerned about people and is willing to do what she can to help them. Crystal is a

Court Clerk with the Superior Court of the State of New Jersey. Her responsibilities include intake interviews for child support, as well as sound recording of matrimonial hearings, domestic issue hearings and custody trials.

Crystal is a lively, charming young woman who clearly sees her bright future. She is in the last year of earning her Bachelors degree from Jersey City University and after graduation, she hopes to become a Juvenile Officer with the Superior Court. She sees a real need for more good people to work with youth, and knows she is well qualified and prepared to do the job. "I have had some experience with the juvenile program and helped teach hygiene to kids. I am a mother, and I know why cleanliness is important. I help those kids be able to be better off," she recalls.

Crystal has three children: Jasmine (19) a college student, Yasmine (15) a high school student, and Malachi who hopes to enroll in a Charter School this fall. They have lived in several rented homes in Newark and are truly looking forward to owning their first home.

A long-time resident of Newark, Crystal has lived in several sections of the city, including the North Ward, the South Ward and the Vailsburg section. She recalls her younger days when her grandmother lived on Fairmount Avenue, right near where HFHN is located.

Home ownership is a big draw for Crystal and she is proudly looking forward to owning her first home. "And just think," she says. "It all happened when I saw all the builders and parked my car so I could find out what was going on!" ●

## Staff Spotlight: Eric Turner, He Knows Newark & He Knows Construction

By T. Peter Sullivan

Eric Turner, a Foreman at Habitat, knows Newark. He was born and raised in the South Ward. His mother ran a cleaning business there for 20 years and then went into the bar business in Newark. Eric knows the city, the people, how it works and how to get things done.

He graduated from South Side High School where he played sports and was a basketball stand-out. He then graduated from Baeard Junior College where his star in basketball continued to shine.

Eric also knows the construction business, and he loves carpentry. Before joining Habitat Newark, he worked for a rubber roofing business and in a family construction business. He loves carpentry work so much, he does cabinetry on the side in his spare time.

The combination of his knowledge of Newark and of construction makes him perfect for the key role he plays at Habitat for Humanity Newark.

Eric started out as a volunteer and then came to work full-time in 1998 when Theresa Marshall was board president. He likes four main things about HFHN. "First, this is a Christian organization. Where else could I go to work where we start each day with a prayer? It reminds us that we are giving

something back and that our efforts are more than just labor, they have results that mean much to other people," said Eric.

Second, he likes the crew he works with. Eric says that, "The Habitat Way requires special skills and a lot of patience. Some days it requires significant "re-do" work and that takes a great team of people with super attitudes to get the job done and get it done right. The Carpenter's Club has become more and more important helping us get things done right."

Third, he finds working with volunteers very rewarding. "People come here to help, to make a contribution. My job is to help make sure that happens and I find great satisfaction when volunteers leave here knowing they have accomplished something worthwhile. Seeing volunteers learn and achieve really means a lot to me," continued Eric.

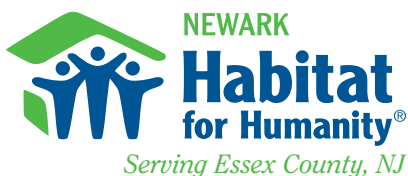
Finally, "there is nothing in the world like seeing a new homeowner's face the day they move into their house. I have seen the kinds of places they are coming from and know how much their lives improve on that day. I understand how they do not

have to return to the conditions they were in and seeing that makes it all worthwhile for me," said Eric.

Eric is the father of four. He also has some long-term plans that include returning to college part-time to continue his study of civil engineering, in addition to the courses he has already taken in property management. ●

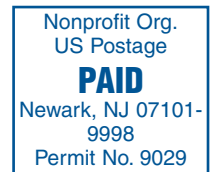


*One of the things Eric Turner likes best about his job is working with volunteers. He's pictured here getting ready to install a window on Fairmount Avenue with Siloia Diaz who is a Partner Family and soon-to-be new homeowner, and Virginia Petrucci a regular volunteer for six years.*



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Please call or e-mail us ([officemanager@habitatnewark.org](mailto:officemanager@habitatnewark.org)) if you are receiving multiple copies or no longer wish to receive The ToolBox.



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