

## Newark mom building Habitat for Humanity house gets help from volunteers for Mother's Day

By Rohan Mascarenhas/The Star-Ledger

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Robert Sciarrino/The Star-Ledger

Future Habitat for Humanity homeowner Katina Leake is all smiles as she arrives to work on her future home.

**NEWARK** — Katina Leake has a typical mother's checklist this year. Buy a dress for her daughter's prom in June. Send her off to college. Keep her school bus driver job to pay the rent.

But there's an extra item that stands out: build her own home with Habitat for Humanity on the weekends.

"I questioned if I could do it at first," said Leake, 37, a single mother of three. "But I get my strength from looking at my children's eyes. When I want to give up, I know I can't because of them."

Sporting a white hard hat, Leake had some help today when two dozen volunteers — mostly women — showed up in honor of Mother's Day at her likely future home, a two-story, three-bedroom structure on 12th Avenue.

They came as part of National Women Build Week, a Habitat initiative that aims to highlight the often dire housing situation single mothers face.

"Nearly 80 percent of our homeowners nationwide are single women with children," said Lynne Blaesser, a co-chair with Habitat Newark. "It requires something special because they have to work all week."

Habitat, a nonprofit that has built more than 350,000 houses worldwide, has stiff requirements for potential homeowners, who must have a full-time job and pay back a no-interest loan.

Longtime volunteer Virginia Petrucci, 46, of Jersey City, was among the women today hammering at blocks of wood as rain fell through cracks in the partially built two-story home.

"The group of women here is special," she said. "You get to know them. You start telling stories and you have a laugh. Women are strong, sometimes stronger than men."

The construction also provided a chance for Maylene Lopez, 20, of Newark to spend time with her mother, Sylvia Loperena, 42, another potential Habitat homeowner.

"I have to help my mom," Lopez said, smiling. "I think these women are special, to come here and help us with their time."



Volunteers celebrate Mother's Day with Habitat project

Lisa Kelly, from Roseland, uses a hammer and a pry bar to remove a 2x4 which served as a temporary support. her Kelly is one of the many female volunteers who gave up her Saturday to help construct a house in Newark's west ward during Habitat for Humanity's National Women Build Week. (Robert Solarrino/The Star-Ledger)

