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Several Essex County Congregations Join Habit for Humanity Newark to Build Home for Hard Working Partner Family

By: Dennis Percher

Ground Breaking Sunday October 7th at 2:30 PM



Pictured above on the left is Len Sanders and on the right Hendricks Davis. Len is a member of Ahavas Sholom Jewish Congregation, one of the few remaining synagogues in Newark and a member of his congregation donated the land upon which the Abraham House will be constructed. Hendricks is Executive Director for Habitat for Humanity Newark. The pair was at the synagogue for the deed transfer ceremony.

Abraham House is an effort by more than a dozen local spiritual and ethically-based organizations to work together to fund and help build a Habitat for Humanity Newark home. The initiative began with Prospect Presbyterian Church of Maplewood taking a portion of their capital campaign tithe to support this local mission.

The initial idea was a house in Newark for a family living in substandard housing built by the children of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims. In the course of dialogue over the last five months within the greater Maplewood-South Orange community, that vision has expanded to

include more organizations and a broader mission including Hindu, Buddhists and Ethical Culture organizations.



The Reverend Rick Boyer, pastor of Prospect Presbyterian Church of Maplewood (third from left), presents a check to from his congregation to key members of the Habitat for Humanity Newark team. The check will support building of the Abraham House. Pictured above are Tracey Alexander, Chairman of the HFHN Board of Directors, Margaret Prentice, Chair of the Faith Relations Committee and of the Abraham House project and Hendricks Davis, Executive Director of HFHN.

The ground breaking ceremonies for the Abraham House will be held at 2:30 PM, Sunday October 7th, on the site for the new home at 255 South 6th Street, Newark. The lot is directly across the street from HFHN's offices. Representatives of religious congregations in South Orange, Maplewood, Irvington, Millburn and Newark along with leaders from Habitat for Humanity Newark will be on hand to break ground.

“In Hebrew Scripture God promises Abraham that his children would be many and they would be a blessing to the world. Indeed his descendants went on to populate many parts of the world and to establish many religious faiths including Muslims, Jews, Christians, and others,” commented Rev. Rick Boyer, pastor of Prospect Presbyterian Church of Maplewood. “Now these groups are coming together with Habitat for Humanity Newark to fund and help build a new home in partnership with a low-income family that currently lives in substandard housing.”

“At our first Steering Committee meeting, we realized this was going to be greater than the genealogy of Abraham and building a house,” explained Margaret Prentice, organizer of the group and Chair of Habitat for Humanity Newark’s Faith Relations Committee. “The mission now includes building interfaith bridges, strengthening our communities and our ties to the Newark community, and demonstrating that groups of different faiths and cultural backgrounds can unite and build a more peaceful and compassionate society,” she said.

“Our commitment to Habitat Newark is \$90,000 for construction of the Abraham House,” said Prentice. “We’ve been enormously blessed by a member of Newark’s Ahavas Sholom Jewish Congregation, who donated the land for Abraham House,” she explained. The group hopes to have \$45,000 collected by mid-October to lay the foundations for the 1440 square foot home this fall.

Barry Wolfensohn, a member of Habitat’s Faith Relations Committee, found a novel way for individuals to contribute and feel they are an integral part of the Abraham House. “The house has approximately 1440 square feet, and that amounts to \$62.50 per square foot. We hope we’ll see lots of contributions of \$62.50, said Wolfensohn.

“We are optimistic that we can raise the money in the next month so we can lay the actual foundation before it gets too cold. The family for the house is being selected and will put in hundreds of hours of effort as well as paying back the cost of the house interest free,” stated Hendricks Davis, Director of Habitat for Humanity Newark. He cited that Sunday, October 7th was chosen because it immediately follows Building on Faith Week at HFHN where numerous congregations volunteer. The week in Christianity is “World Communion Sunday.”

Spiritual and ethically-based organizations of all types are contributing money and volunteers for Abraham House. Representatives on the Steering Committee include members of: Prospect Presbyterian, Temple Sharey Tefilo, St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic, Oheb Shalom, Morrow Memorial United Methodist, Dharmachakra Buddhist Center, Congregation Beth El, St. George’s Episcopal, St. Stephen’s Episcopal, Our Lady of Sorrows, South Orange/Vailsburg United Methodist, First Maplewood Baptist, First Baptist of South Orange, Ethical Culture Society of Essex County, and Masjid Waarith-Ud Deen at Waris C.R.D.C.

Habitat for Humanity Newark, an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry seeking to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action.

Partner families are hard working families, who dedicate themselves to 400 hours of volunteer labor to help build their home and their neighbor’s homes, and who pay mortgages based on their ability. HFHN is not only building new and better homes in this Newark neighborhood is also helping strengthen the community and making it more financially stable.