



# Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity

Building Houses in Partnership with God's People in Need

March 2008

## Dedication of Kathy Perry's Home

**K**athy Perry's Habitat house at 24 Stanley Street in Amherst, the first of four to be built by the new Amherst College-Habitat Partnership, was dedicated on January 20th. To reach it over one hundred of us walked along a frozen field through a cutting wind. We all felt the primordial human need for shelter.

Imagine our pleasure on entering a warm, bright house all finished except the carpeting. The warmth seemed to come from Kathy Perry herself. Some warmth came from the rest of us, delighted to see each other as members of Habitat's extended family. But the welcome warmth was mainly the achievement of **Chuck Roberts** of **Kuhn Riddle Architects** in Amherst, whose design was a pro bono contribution to Valley Habitat. Chuck designed a house whose long side faces south, with walls eight inches thick and siding at once airtight, fireproof, and durable. Come spring, electricity-generating photovoltaic panels will be installed on the roof.

Kathy asked for an "open" floor plan – giving a spacious feel to the living area. Kathy chose the color of the interior, an alabaster white, warm in winter and cool in summer.

The dedication began with an invocation by Jacquelyn Smith-Crooks and a welcome by Brandon Braxton, PVH President and **Molly Mead**, representing the **Amherst College Center for Community Engagement**.

Sheila Klem, Kathy Perry's Habitat Mentor, introduced Kathy and her daughter Rachel, and presented them with a Bible and a Guide to Home Repair. Peggy Bow gave them the traditional Pioneer Valley Habitat sampler, and Father Doug Magonagle blessed the new house. We concluded with the traditional Habitat Dedication Song, derived from Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy," and Kathy Perry's version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas ("On the fifth day of Christmas Habitat sent to me/ Five college students to help construct . . .") This event celebrated the new partnership of PVH and Amherst College and brought together people skilled in the use of hammers, paint, computers, nails, blue prints and much more.



Photo by Andrew Yew

Kathy Perry Shows off Sampler Received at Dedication

## A New Habitat Family



Ashlee Cancio-Bello will occupy the next Habitat home on Stanley Street in Amherst

Six years ago, Ashlee Cancio-Bello was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nicaragua. She worked for Habitat for Humanity International, translating documents and training school teachers in environmental education. Now Ashlee's association with Habitat is about to take on a new dimension as she prepares to occupy a Habitat-built home in Amherst. In a year or so she, with her five-year old son Ernie, will move into the second house constructed on land on Stanley Street donated by **Amherst College**.

Born and raised in Vermont, Ashlee was introduced to the Valley as a freshman at Smith. Although family

**Kathy Perry writes:** *I view our home as a beautifully woven tapestry with each thread representing a volunteer who hammered a nail, cut a piece of siding, sawed a piece of wood, swept a floor, raised a beam or wall, shingled a roof, brought coffee or hot chocolate to volunteers, or donated to Habitat. This tapestry is a work in progress and each volunteer and donor makes this tapestry more vibrant and beautiful. We are grateful for the opportunity to be a Partner Family living in our new home!*

(Continued on page 2)

# We're Going to Raise that Roof!

I came to observe. As a board member, I wanted to see what happened at the Amherst **Raise the Roof Breakfast**, but I wasn't really involved. I sat down, bit into a tasty scone, and noted a room full of people at 7:30 am. We were welcomed by Brandon Braxton, president of Pioneer Valley Habitat, and James Brassord of Amherst College, celebrating the unique partnership between the two. The invocation was given by Rev. **Caroline Meyers**, pastor of **South Congregational Church**, Amherst, one of our most supportive partner congregations. **Amherst College President Anthony Marx** emphasized the partnership in his remarks.

Then Ashlee spoke and my "neutral observer" status was shot. (See the story on page 1 about Ashlee.) Her poignant mix of struggle and ambition made for a very moving story. Ernie, her five-year old son, clutched her hand as she spoke. I was hooked--reminded of why I was

a Habitat supporter in the first place.

Then it was Peter Jessop's turn. Peter is a member of the Board of Directors and has a wide range of Habitat experience. Although hammers are his business, today he was after our pens. Then he said, "I do not want your donations" (Wait, wait, Peter, this is a fundraiser!), "I want your investment." Our checks to PVH don't just disappear into an area of need, they come back. Ashlee is going to buy that house and the money is going to be re-invested in more affordable housing, and that housing is going to stay right here as a tax-paying part of the community.

We were sent on our way by Rev. Christopher Carlisle, UMass Episcopal chaplain and former PVH Board member. He gave a benediction—literally, saying "good"—and that pretty well sums up the morning!

## Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity

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## Heartfelt Thank You

What do we need before we can even think of building affordable housing? That's right—a piece of land to put it on. Now we have two more sites—one in Amherst, donated by **Doug Kohl** and one in Easthampton, donated by **Dave Lepine**. A very large thank you goes out to these developers for helping us to fulfill our mission.

## New Family *(Continued from page 1)*

financial problems caused her to leave after only a year, she got to know and appreciate the Valley's many social and cultural attractions. She wants Ernie, whose father is Nicaraguan, to grow up in a community with more diversity than is found in Vermont. Consequently, two years ago she decided to move to Amherst. She first worked at Grace House, a recovery center for individuals suffering from substance abuse, supervising their daycare program. At present she is a substitute teacher in the Amherst school system, while Ernie attends kindergarten at Wildwood School.

Since moving to Amherst, Ashlee and Ernie have been living in one room in the basement of a friend's home, sharing a bath and kitchen with the friend and her child. After Ernie goes to sleep, Ashlee does her work in the alcove she improvised near the furnace. When she learned last summer that she was a finalist for the Habitat house, she was thrilled; when she was selected, it was an impossible dream come true. And Ernie is excited about having his own room.

Ashlee hopes to pursue a career as a program manager or coordinator for a nonprofit organization, serving people and the environment. Perhaps a few years down the road will see her in an administrative position at PVHH. She seems eminently well qualified.

# Our New President, Brandon Braxton



Brandon knows the Valley well because he put himself through Amherst College, class of '98. He worked various jobs while taking classes and writing papers, so this young man had to live in the real world as well as the ivory tower. He chose a career path and planned how to begin it before graduation. After all, he already had a wife to support!

He returned to his native Buffalo for “basic training” in commercial banking, learning on the job. Next came a position at Wachovia Bank in Connecticut. In the fall of 2005 Brandon was hired by the West Springfield branch of United Bank. A Gazette article announcing his appointment caught the eagle eye of Nominating Committee chairman George Goodwin. The PVH-Amherst College collaboration was about to be made public. Here was a man with two major assets: his profession and his link to Habitat’s new partner!

In PVH, Brandon saw a way to balance out his work in housing. Much of his commercial lending activity is tied up with real estate and earning “big bucks” for his company, while volunteering for Habitat is about helping partner families who pay sweat equity while slowly building their dream house. And United Bank, like many institutions in this area, encourages its employees to give their time and talent to local non-profits..

Once on board, Brandon worked on various committees (e.g., Site Selection and Amherst Steering Committees). By the summer of 2006, however, the Stanley Street project was ready to take off with ground breaking and construction of the first house scheduled for the fall.

While on the fundraising committee, he urged PVH to do financial planning and major fundraising to support our ambitious building program. In the fall of 2006, now a Vice President of Commercial Banking and working in Northampton, he joined the PVH board and a year later succeeded Nancy Denig as president. After talking with this straightforward, modest, articulate banker you feel sure he’ll help PVH make some “decent bucks” to help our partner families move one day into a home of their own.

## Meet Tomi Schneider

Our new Office Manager’s first name is Hitomi, but she says that Tomi is easier for people to learn. She moved to the Valley last summer. Born in Japan but speaking fluent English, Tomi is a trained musician (piano and voice). Her daughter, a student at Northampton High, plays violin and they enjoy making music together. Her husband teaches Chinese literature and civilization at UMass. Who knows? One of these days we may hear Tomi in a local concert. She would love to join a group in the five college area.

When asked what managers do Tomi said that MJ briefs her every morning on what’s happening that day. Tomi does everything she can to support the work of Habitat volunteers: it could be a bit of clerical work, answering the phone, or replacing an office volunteer for an hour or so. Her main job, however, isn’t variable; it’s bookkeeping! Having worked in New York and San Francisco banks, Tomi adjusted quickly to filling that vital role for the PVH office. She’s going to attend Finance Committee meetings and prepare financial reports. Tomi enjoys the lively office rhythm and meeting lots of different people who are dedicated to Habitat’s mission.

By the way, Bonnie Bandolin, our former manager, graduated from Holyoke Community College and took a full time job with MassMutual Insurance. Many thanks, Bonnie, and good luck!

## Tee up with Habitat

Have fun with friends while you make a big difference. Come join your friends on May 12th at the Hickory Ridge Country Club at noon for Habitat’s Annual Golf Tournament, which includes a round of golf followed by a tasty dinner. You and your friends will know that you are helping local families with their dreams of homeownership—while going for “par.” Gather a group of friends; golfers of all abilities are welcome. The cost is \$400 for each foursome. To register and for more information, visit [www.pioneervalleyhabitat.org](http://www.pioneervalleyhabitat.org) and check out the “upcoming events” link.

Is your company looking to get your name out there and support the local community? Habitat is looking for corporate sponsors with sponsorship opportunities ranging from \$100 to \$1,000. (See website for sponsorship info too!)



Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity

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[www.pioneervalleyhabitat.org](http://www.pioneervalleyhabitat.org)

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## Upcoming Events

- April 6th – Crew Leader/Site Supervisor Training – 11am-4pm – site TBA
- Partner Family Outreach – Spread the word to potential partner families. This orientation will explain the program and how to become a successful candidate. Learn where Habitat will be building and when applications will be due.  
April 6 – 1st Congregational Church, 165 Main St., Amherst, 3:00pm  
May 4 – 3:00pm location in Northampton to be announced (will be posted on our website and phone message)
- Weekends in April – Kayak Raffle ticket sales at Shelburne Coffee Roasters on Rt. 2
- May 4 – Women’s Build at Stanley Street site (You go, girl – grab that hammer!)
- May 10 – **St. James Coffeehouse**, 8 Church St., Greenfield, PVH benefit. Watch for details
- May 12 – PVH Golf Tournament, Amherst (see info inside)
- June 12 – Raise the Roof Breakfast in Franklin County, **Eaglebrook School**, Deerfield

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## Be an Advocate

While Habitat for Humanity works to partner with as many families as possible to provide decent affordable housing, the worldwide housing crisis remains huge. To address this need, Habitat International recently began to pair its successful building efforts with advocacy around housing issues. To learn more, visit [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org) and sign up to be an advocate. You can explore public policy and legislative priorities and take action to contact elected officials in support of specific legislation. (Yes! We want to keep our AmeriCorps workers!) Sometimes we need to act beyond “locally,” and now that is easy to do. It’s one more way to fulfill our mission.

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## Fundraisers All Over the Valley

We are fortunate to have lots of groups raising lots of money for us. On the part of Pioneer Valley Habitat and families in need, deep gratitude goes out to:

- ❖ Powderpuff Football Game at Turners Falls High School
- ❖ Amherst Artisans show in Amherst
- ❖ CD release party by **John Cate** at the **Evolution Café** in Florence
- ❖ Mystery Dinner Theater at **All Saint’s Church** in South Hadley
- ❖ Opening Day benefit at **Steve’s Sugar Shack** in Westhampton
- ❖ Rescheduling Note: The Lazer 99.3 Speedo Santa Fundraiser Road Race that was canceled due to a storm in December will happen on July 26.

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*Habitat for Humanity, founded in 1976 by Millard and Linda Fuller, is a non-profit, ecumenical, Christian housing ministry working to eliminate substandard housing around the world.*