

News

1,000 join Habitat's Walk for Housing in Newburgh

By Meghan E. Murphy

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NEWBURGH — Carole Bellis, 66, left an hour before the rest of the walkers so she could finish in time for the festivities at Downing Park.

She walked down DuBois and Liberty streets, and through the East End of Newburgh. Except for the occasional dog walker matching her stride, she followed the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Newburgh Walk for Housing path alone yesterday.

The lifelong resident's feat symbolizes how the home-building organization has changed Newburgh.

"For a long time, it was true that people would be afraid to do that," she said of walking alone in that part of town.

As Bellis turned a corner toward the finish line, she met with about 1,000 people starting their fundraising march. The retired North Junior High School teacher cheered them on.

"One of the reasons I'm so enthusiastic about Habitat is that I've seen the difference it makes in a child coming to school," she said.

Over the last eight years, Habitat has constructed 32 homes for 170 individuals in the city's toughest neighborhoods, said Jessica Sun, director of finance and development. Four to five more houses will be completed this year. A Habitat ReStore — providing reused home furnishings and construction items at affordable prices — will have its grand opening from July 10 to 12 at 125 Washington St.

Bill Murphy, a founding member of the local Habitat chapter, said he never expected the group to accomplish so much so quickly. Yet the need in Newburgh for affordable housing is still great. That's why the chapter is also partnering with developers Leyland Associates on a 24-home neighborhood on East Parmenter Street with a combination of Habitat and other affordable homes. The first of those will be built in memory of former Times Herald-Record Executive Editor Mike Levine.

Like Levine did, Murphy wants to bolster the sense of community in Newburgh, and the East Parmenter project will be exemplary.

"That will be a whole neighborhood rising from the ashes," he said.

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