

May 7th, 2008

9th Annual Walk for Housing

By Chuck Stewart, Jr.

Newburgh - Approximately 1,000 people gathered in Downing Park Sunday to participate in Habitat for Humanity of Greater Newburgh's 9th Annual Walk for Housing.

While the forecast was for rain, that didn't deter walkers like Michael James who brought his entire family to support Habitat and its mission for providing decent affordable housing.



The James' family partnered with Habitat over a year ago and has seen first hand the transformation of their home and many others. Before Habitat took over the James' home, it had been abandoned and neglected for years, with broken windows and cracked, mold-covered walls. But with the help of hundreds of volunteers who worked tirelessly to rehabilitate the house, it has new walls, new energy-efficient windows, and a fresh coat of paint.

Habitat is not only transforming neighborhoods, but families as well. "We have seen a big difference in our three kids. They are so much happier now," Michael James said. He and his wife still volunteer on Wednesdays and Saturdays so the dream of home ownership can be realized more families in the program.

Pilar Arauco, Habitat's most recent home owner, still can't believe it. "It's so great," she says. "I wake up every morning and think - oh my God. I'm in my own bedroom!" She knows this house has made a difference for her children as well. Her son says, "Mom, I want to take care of this house."

Over the last eight years, Habitat has constructed 32 homes. "Habitat is about providing local families the opportunity to own their own homes. Using volunteer labor and donated material we can make home ownership affordable to very low income local families, and families can put down roots and thrive," said Deirdre Glenn, Executive Director of Habitat of Greater Newburgh.

The annual 5K walk through the City of Newburgh, gave walkers an opportunity to see three Habitat houses in progress and 11 completed houses. In addition to raising over \$75,000 to continue the work of Habitat's mission, this year's walk also focused on its advocacy role. Habitat informed walkers of some of the deplorable housing conditions in which children live. For example, every morning 1.6 billion people wake up in poverty housing; poor housing and homelessness has the greatest impact on children; children in poverty housing are 10 times more likely to develop asthma, respiratory problems and meningitis; and New York state ranks 47th in the nation in housing affordability.

This year Habitat has plans to complete four to five more houses and start building a community of East Parmenter Street. In June a Builders Blitz will take place (that's where Habitat builds two homes in just five days). In July the Habitat ReStore will be opening at 125 Washington Street. The ReStore will be a place to purchase used home furnishings and construction items at discounted prices.