

## GIVING BACK

# Dream comes true with help of many volunteers

By **Cindy Butler Focke**  
Correspondent

## VIRGINIA BEACH

Habitat for Humanity South Hampton Roads' first town home project is a dream come true – multiplied – for four single-parent families in Virginia Beach.

A couple hundred community members gathered at Nelms Lane on Jan. 21 for a dedication ceremony. The Boys Choir of Hampton Roads set the tone for the happy occasion as it performed on the new front porch of Cherie Wilson.

Wilson, 36, has moved from apartment to apartment over the years and admitted she was both overwhelmed and excited.

"I can't believe it," she said. Her 4-year-old daughter, Jayden, said she looks forward to having a pink bedroom.

Kiska Morris will soon be the Wilson's neighbor.

"I'm kind of glad it's raining because I'm a crier," she told the crowd. Morris thanked all involved in making it possible for her family, including teenage sons Vidal and Keenen, to own a new home.

"Never give up dreaming," she urged.

New home buyer Yvonne Davis and her two teenage children have lived with a friend for the past year.

"It's a blessing," she said of the town home that will be hers.

The local chapter of Habitat for Humanity strives to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake,

Virginia Beach, Suffolk, Smithfield and Isle of Wight County. Since 1988 more than 170 homes have been constructed.

Sharon Chittim, director of family services for the organization, said the screening process begins with submission of an eligibility form. Upon qualifying, an interview is held, followed by a credit and criminal background check, and a home visit. It can take anywhere from 18 to 24 months to be accepted into the program and matched with a home, she said.

Then the journey to home ownership begins, said Carla Johnson, director of development and marketing. Applicants attend classes on topics such as money management, and build supportive relationships with each other and the Habitat staff.

The opportunity to be hands on during construction gives them a vested interest in their homes, Johnson said. Vidal Morris, 19, said he learned a lot, including how to install vinyl siding, and build a shed.

Each of the four two-story Nelms Lane town homes is similar: about 1,200 square feet with three bedrooms and two full baths. The new residents should be able to move in within the next couple months, said Helen Sommer, Habitat executive director. They'll rent until their no-interest, 30-year mortgages are finalized.

Construction began in April with a grant from Bank of America.

"Projects like these don't happen magically," said Don Weeks, Habitat's board president. "They are the



CINDY BUTLER FOCKE PHOTO FOR THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

**New homeowner Cherie Wilson and her 4-year-old daughter, Jayden, prepare to cut the ribbon on their brand-new town home made possible through the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity.**

result of generosity and hard work."

He applauded Habitat's construction manager, Joe Rosenhouse, as the driving force behind the project, and praised all the volunteers, including Virginia Wesleyan College students, Bank of America employees, church members and individuals.

During the ceremony, the new homeowners were presented with American flags, gift baskets, Bibles and large wooden keys inscribed with blessings from those who helped build their homes.

First time homeowner Virgia Green, who has raised grandson Tyreek Tinsley, 18, since her daughter died 17 years ago, expressed heartfelt appreciation.

"Thank you for a hand up and not a hand out," she said.

Habitat's second town home venture, on Bonney Road in Virginia Beach, should begin construction in late summer.

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## learn more

**How to apply** Applications for Habitat for Humanity South Hampton Roads potential home buyers are being accepted through Jan. 31 and are available at the Habitat office, 900 Tidewater Drive in Norfolk, or on the website, [www.shrhabitat.org](http://www.shrhabitat.org).

**How to donate** Items are needed for Habitat's three general stores, which sell new and recycled building materials, plus clothing, housewares, electronics and furniture. The organization will pick up items, such as gently used cabinets and counters, and re-sell them. More details are available on the website.

**How to lend a hand** "A Brush with Kindness" is Habitat's home-repair program. Homeowners apply for repairs, such as building a ramp or painting a house, and agree to pay a partial fee. Habitat, through grants and donations, provides materials and volunteers. To apply or volunteer, call Kelly Beardenat (757) 640-0590, ext. 205.

**Also, skilled carpenters, and individuals** licensed in hanging drywall, plumbing, electrical and heating, ventilation and air conditioning are needed for weekday work at current projects in Portsmouth and the Willoughby section of Norfolk. Call Cori Reed at (757) 640-0590, ext. 207.

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