“We have a really good life and this is a good way to give back.”

Dick Shasteen met with me at the Staniford Road duplex construction site Burlington, taking a break from providing materials to volunteers. He chuckled and said, “Sometimes my wife, Darlene, says that I’m spending too much of my time on Habitat work, but I love doing it. If we can pull some families off public assistance and help them to become self-sufficient it’s well worth my time.”

During his years at IBM, Dick worked his way up the ladder, eventually supervising 800 people in the US and other countries, and he learned a lot about managing people. “I always took personal responsibility if anything went wrong, no matter who was involved.” Now retired, he uses those same skills to keep his construction volunteers happy and motivated, and a core group of men and women, who named themselves “the Geezers”, volunteer once or twice each week to help build homes for local families. “My career required that I improve quality and reduce cost and I do that when I (volunteer) supervise Green Mountain Habitat home builds”

Dick also treats vendors well by being organized, knowing what is needed in advance and sending thank you notes. “Not only do we receive great service from suppliers and tradespeople, but often they give us discounts and some become financial donors.”

People skills are important but obviously so are construction skills and Dick and his wife have built and sold several houses and enjoyed the process as well as how to manage all the facets.

Along with building decent, simple homes for families in need, Dick is committed to making them as energy-efficient as possible, while working within tight budgets. “It does a family no good to purchase a house and then not be able to afford the upkeep and energy bills.” With each house, Dick works with Efficiency Vermont from the plans to the finished home, to incorporate new energy saving components and as a result, GMHH built homes receive the Energy Star rating and, just recently, the new Indoor AirPlus rating. These efficiencies mean that the families will spend less on their utility bills, just as they spend less on their mortgage/property tax/home insurance than most did on rent alone. These savings are one factor in the “hand up” to the families, and an opportunity for them to become more financially stable.

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“I could write a book about what this home will mean to my family”

I can’t wait to get out of subsidized housing and to start building equity by paying my mortgage to Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity! Rebecca Mann smiled as she said that. “I enjoy working as the supervisor of the drop-in child care center at the Greater Burlington YMCA, but the salary isn’t enough to come close to buying a home on the open market. Being selected to become a GMHH homeowner family is a great opportunity for me to grow with the responsibilities of homeownership.”

Her 12 year old son isn’t interested in building equity, of course, but he is really looking forward to a basement where he can play his guitar! He and his mother are also looking forward to being close to the bike path.

Their 2-bedroom, 1-bath home will also have a yard to share with the other family in their duplex and both mother and son are looking forward to having outside space.

“When I’m at the build site, during breaks from working on my sweat equity, I walk around the house and imagine where I’ll put our couch and what plants I’ll put in the garden.”

“The sweat equity” requirement makes a lot of sense because I’ll be able to learn so much from that experience. Working with the volunteers at the build site of my new future home has not only given me the opportunity to meet and personally thank them, said Becca, “it has also allowed me to work alongside my new neighbors who I will be sharing the land with. I could not think of a better way to ensure that families care for their homes and partner with their future neighbors in creating a healthy habitat than having them build it together. Thank you Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity!”

Questions? Suggestions? Contact Catherine at cstevens@vermonthabitat.org.
A ‘Lost Boy of Sudan’ will finally have a home

**Mary and Simon working on their sweat equity hours at their future Cottage Grove home in Burlington.**

Simon became one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” at the age of 6. He literally ran from his country, along with an estimated 20,000 other young boys, to avoid being killed or conscripted into the army in the Second Sudanese Civil War in 1987. These “Lost Boys” walked more than a thousand miles, wandering in and out of war zones, and spent the next four years in dire conditions. Thousands of boys lost their lives to hunger, dehydration, and exhaustion. Some were attacked and killed by wild animals; others drowned crossing rivers and many were caught in the crossfire of fighting forces, half of them dying before reaching Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, a sprawling, parched settlement of mud huts, where the survivors lived for eight years under the care of refugee relief organizations.

Simon moved to Texas and worked for the Tyson meat company from 2006-2011. He started his petition to bring his family from Africa to this country, but he had to have a sufficient amount of money in order to have his petition accepted. In 2011, Simon, Mary and their children were able to move to Vermont, a place that the family considers “home.”

Simon works at the UVM Medical Center, and Mary is a resident care associate at a senior care facility. They are currently living in a small apartment where they fear for their children’s’ safety. Cars, including theirs, have been broken into and their daughter was frightened by other kids who had knives.

Hanging grown up in frightening and dangerous circumstances, Simon and Mary understandably want their children to be safe. “I am looking forward to having a home where our children can play outside safely in the back yard”, said Mary.

“Owning our own home will make a big difference to the safety of our family”, Simon added, “And we are so excited about having the responsibility to maintain and meet certain standards with our new home during our lifetime. We will also save money for our children. I will be happy to pay our mortgage for 30 years”