

SPIRIT ONLINE

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There's No Place Like Home

Habitat for Humanity makes homeownership reality for VA employee

Home ownership is part of the American Dream, but for many, it continues to remain out of reach. Thanks to the Bridgeport chapter of Habitat for Humanity, one VA Connecticut employee realized that dream.

After years of yearning to buy a home, **Kim Lanham**, Lead Transportation Assistant in the Business Office, moved into her new home Dec. 28, 2003.

The home, located on a street soon to be renamed "New Hope Road" in Stratford, is part of a Habitat for Humanity neighborhood that will eventually be home to 18 families.

Though aware of the program for several years, Kim did not pursue it until she attended a dedication service at the home of a fellow First Baptist Church [Stratford] choir member. "She [the owner] was always asking choir members to volunteer to work on her house and everybody always said 'no'," the Army veteran said. "I guess she didn't really explain to us what it was all about and it wasn't until she asked the choir to sing at her house dedication that I started to ask questions about the Habitat for Humanity program."

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Kim Lanham turns the key at her new home thanks to "sweat equity" and the Habitat for Humanity program.

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Events

West Haven Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance

Jan. 15
11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Staff Dining Room



Happy New Year!

For more information on these and other events please see *Good Morning VA Connecticut*.

Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry that seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness, according to the group's web site. Through volunteer labor and donations of money and materials, Habitat builds and rehabilitates simple, decent houses with the help of the homeowner (partner) families. Habitat houses are sold to partner families at no profit and financed with affordable, no-interest loans.

Once accepted into the program, partner families must contribute 500 "sweat equity" hours toward the building of their home. The partner family must contribute at least 300 of those hours and can solicit volunteers to contribute the other 200 hours.

The Connecticut native and mother of two sons applied in January 2002 and was accepted into the program in June of that same year.

Now on the other side of needing to solicit volunteers to help with her own house, Kim soon learned that finding willing volunteers was no small task. "It's hard to ask people," she said. "It's amazing how you don't realize how you don't find the time to help other people out."

Luckily for Kim, help was close at hand. When Tim Kelly, Disabled American Veteran transportation coordinator at West Haven learned of Kim's need for volunteers, he approached the Residential Rehabilitation Program to see if the veterans would be interested in working with Habitat as one of their volunteer projects. The group agreed, and their efforts contributed 100 hours toward Kim's sweat equity.

"I really appreciated the PRPP program veterans coming out to help me," she said. On Habitat's "Corporate Build" Day, 60 volunteers from Sikorsky and Citicorp also contributed sweat equity hours toward Kim's home.

Aside from working on your own home, partner families also work on other Habitat homes doing such things as painting, minor repairs and landscaping. "I learned a lot working on the other homes because we did the types of things you have to do to maintain your own home," she said.

In addition to the sweat equity, partner families must attend classes in subjects such as budgeting and landscaping prior to moving into their own house. "Habitat wants to make sure you can maintain the home once you get it," she said. The application process also involves a home visit so that Habitat can verify that families properly maintain their current residence.

The duplex Kim will move into includes three bedrooms, an open living room/dining room, one-and-a-half bathrooms, an unfinished basement, fenced in yard and most appliances.

Kim tried other homebuyer programs prior to Habitat, but none were in the Stratford/Bridgeport-area. "I was accepted into programs in New Haven and Hamden, but these programs required you to live there," she said. "My family support network is in Bridgeport and Stratford, and with two school-aged children, I wanted to stay in the area."

Habitat's "simple, decent homes" are for those who might not otherwise be able to obtain one. "At first, I was kind of ashamed to be in the program," Kim said. Early in the process during a conversation with one of her friends, Kim commented on the home's square footage. "My friend asked me, 'How many square feet do you have now?' I thought about it for a minute and she said, 'You have none.' Then I said, 'You're right.'"

Like many first-time homebuyers, financially meeting the monthly mortgage payment is not the issue, saving up the down payment is what creates the obstacle. "People need to know about these types of programs because it can be hard to get a mortgage. Now that I realize the types of homes they build, I want to spread the word to other people," Kim said.

Kim, who has worked at the West Haven campus for 10 years, says she is thankful for all the support she received from her co-workers. Wanda Pannell-Jones threw her a surprise house warming party recently. Fellow workers in the Business Office transportation section gave her a dishwasher as a housewarming gift. And, those choir members who were reluctant to volunteer, pitched in as well.

When asked to co-chair the 2003 Combined Federal Campaign, Kim readily agreed. "I couldn't go back and personally thank everybody who helped me so co-chairing the CFC was my way of giving back to the community," she said.



Kim moved into her new home (pictured above) on Dec. 28.

Director Hosts Holiday Get-Together at Newington

VA Connecticut Director Roger Johnson hosted a holiday get-together Dec. 19 for employees and volunteers at the Newington campus. A large room near the director's suite was decorated and filled with holiday goodies that were enjoyed by those who stopped by between 10:30 a.m. and noon. A holiday party was also held Dec. 15 at the West Haven campus.





Ecumenical Christmas Service

The Chaplain and the Recreation Services co-sponsored an Ecumenical Christmas Service Dec. 23 at the West Haven campus. Patients and staff who gathered in the T3 Recreation Room were treated to rousing renditions of holiday songs performed by the VA Gospel Choir under the direction of **Deborah Miles**. **Sheldon Campbell, M.D.**, also treated the audience to a special selection recalling the story of World War II enemies who ceased fighting one Christmas morning to sing Silent Night.



2003 American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shop



The American Legion Auxiliary held its annual Gift Shop the week of December 7 at the West Haven campus. Holiday gifts are donated to help hospitalized veterans with their holiday shopping. Each year, members of the American Legion chapters and posts throughout the state of Connecticut donate about \$50,000 to the Gift Shop project.





The 2004 Employees Association officers pictured above are: **Shakeela Beaudoin** (President), **Mabel Carol** (Secretary) and **Regina Sexton** (Vice President). Not pictured are **Gary Collier**, **Michele Avery** and **Mary Rupano**.

in the NEWS



- Hartford Courant columnist Susan Campbell referred to Newington homeless veterans outreach nurse **Peter McMullen, RN**, in her Dec. 28 column, "Three Hots and a Cot? Not Enough." The column discussed the increasing demand for homeless services in Connecticut and highlighted McMullen's efforts to encourage homeless veterans to seek VA services.
- Beginning on January 5, 2004, all VA employees will have access to the web based full text version of the New England Journal of Medicine. The Library Program Office, VHA Office of Information has negotiated an enterprise license for VA. This enterprise license will allow VA staff unlimited access to this web journal from any VA networked computer at any time. Access is obtained by IP verification; no user name or password is required. You can now test access from your desktop. Features include:
 - Full text of articles from 1993 to present
 - Abstracts of articles back to 1975
 - Table of Contents alerts with links to full text
 - Access to articles having an impact on public health (such as SARS), which are published online before print
 - Additional online-only supplements and images

To test access, please go to [<<http://content.nejm.org/>>](http://content.nejm.org/). You should see "VA Library Network" listed as the institution under the NEJM seal. If you do not see this, please contact Ginny Dupont via e-mail or at 202-273-8522.

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