

Spring cleaning with Sue at the Field Museum *live!*

## Chicago Tribune

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2009 | 24 hours at [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com) | Afternoon rain; high 63, low 46

## Writing the book on green housing

Students team up with Habitat for Humanity

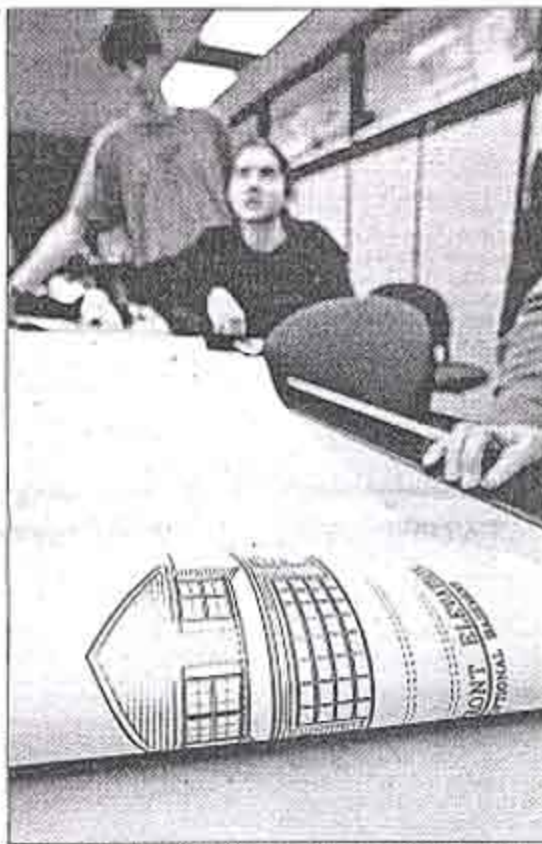
By Gerry Smith  
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Natalie Biagioli wanted to volunteer for manual labor. But when she called DuPage Habitat for Humanity, the agency had something else in mind.

"They said, 'We have this green housing project. Can you help us with it?'" recalled Biagioli, 21, an architecture major at the College of DuPage.

And so began an usual partnership in DuPage County to address two major challenges facing the country—how to conserve energy and put people in homes they can afford.

This semester, College of DuPage students are devising a plan for DuPage Habitat for Humanity to build 11 affordable, energy-efficient homes in West Chicago over the next three years. The class offers students a case study on green building techniques with guidance from Commonwealth Edison experts.



College of DuPage architecture students look over blueprints for Pioneer Prairie homes. CHUCK BERMAN/TRIBUNE PHOTO

"We realized it was an amazing opportunity for the students," said Jane Ostergaard, architecture coordinator at the college. "Any time a student can engage with a real client in a real world situation is a huge opportunity to make their studies real."

For the architecture and construction management students, the project is a glimpse into the future of their chosen field. While the housing market has plummeted, builders nationwide are trying to survive by attracting buyers with energy-saving homes.

The federal government has recently thrown its support behind green building initiatives. Last year, the U.S. Department of Energy issued a "Builders Challenge" for the industry to construct 200,000 ultra-efficient homes by 2012.

And the Obama administration has made energy efficiency a policy priority. The stimulus package, which was signed into law last month, includes at least \$20 million for programs to research green building strategies and fund several programs, including one to improve energy efficiency in low-income homes and government buildings.

The motives behind the project are not only environmental. Since its inception in 1986, DuPage Habitat for Humanity has struggled to create a diverse housing stock in the county as developers have torn down affordable homes to build "McMansions," said Sarah Brachle, executive director for the agency, which builds or rehabs homes and sells them at no profit.

With a limited budget, the agency faces the challenge of



An artist's rendering shows one of the energy-efficient homes to be built in the Pioneer Prairie development in West Chicago.

features, which often add thousands to the cost of a home. This is where the College of DuPage students come in.

In their class, called Sustainable Design Initiative, they are studying simple modifications that could be made to the homes, like using more eco-friendly paint or conserving energy by placing windows to maximize winter sunlight.

In June, DuPage Habitat for Humanity will break ground on the 3-acre Pioneer Prairie subdivision using \$2.5 million in philanthropic, government and community funds to pay for the new homes and rehab five others elsewhere in the county.

To live in one of the homes, families must earn enough income to pay a 30-year mortgage to the Habitat for Humanity and pay local property taxes and utilities, spend 250 hours building their homes and their neighbors' homes and take classes on finance, budgeting and home repair.

Pioneer Prairie will demonstrate how energy-efficient homes can help low-

income families save money on power bills, Brachle said.

"This is not just good for the environment, but it's also good economically for the long term," she said.

Biagioli said she has spent much of her time going to research on manufacturers of energy-saving products such as tankless water heaters.

She said she hopes the class will give her a better understanding of the market for sustainable building practices.

Her professor said the project gives students experience in being "environmental stewards."

"It permeates our industry now," Ostergaard said. "This gives students the opportunity to see that connection."

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## CHICAGOLAND EXTRA

AROUND THE REGION

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