



Representatives from several local organizations and entities that made the Pioneer Prairie possible prepare to break ground.

Triblocal.com photo by Mick Swasko

## DuPage County Habitat breaks ground on green residences

BY MICK SWASKO

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Green and blue painted shovels moved piles of earth in West Chicago June 24, symbolizing the beginning of construction on the largest project in the history of DuPage County Habitat for Humanity—the Pioneer Prairie.

The groundbreaking marked the beginning of work on 11 green residences that will stand at the corner of Sherman and Pomeroy streets, and is the first undertaking by the local Habitat chapter to focus on sustainability and efficiency.

“This is really a milestone in the history of our affiliate,” the organization’s Board President Eric Patton said to a crowd of supporters, volunteers and representatives of local government.

Despite temperatures in excess of 90 degrees in the early morning, the group packed a tent in Pioneer Park near the construction site.

The groundbreaking marks a new beginning in what has been an ongoing process for more than three years, according to DuPage Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Sarah Braschle.

“It is really quite a pioneer project for us,” said Braschle amid the noise of the construction equipment, which was already at work laying the infrastructure for the development. “This is the next phase in innovation for Habitat of DuPage.”

The development of the homes’ green design was made possible by a partnership between DuPage Habitat for Humanity, Commonwealth Edison and the College of DuPage’s sustainable design initiative. As a part of a

first- and second-year course, COD students researched materials and methods that could be used to ensure the homes were environmentally sound as well as affordable.

“We really pushed them and they really rose to the challenge,” Jane Ostergaard, coordinator of architecture at the college, said. “It’s a great showcase that you don’t have to spend a fortune to make a difference with sustainability issues.”

Some of the solutions students researched that will be implemented in the development include low-flow shower and sink heads, as well as toilets that alone will save 240,000 gallons of water in the lifetime of the homes.

The sustainable project will eventually house 11 families who live or work in the county, some of whom have already been chosen and others who have yet to be screened.

In order to qualify to live in a Habitat home, a family must meet a specific median income based on family size as well as demonstrate a need for the housing and commit to partnering with Habitat on both the construction and maintenance of the home.

The Pioneer Prairie project will cost the non-profit an estimated \$4.4 million to complete—\$4.2 million of which has already been secured or accounted for with intended contributions from various donors, according to Braschle. This includes an additional seven properties Habitat has set its sites on for single-family residences.

After the construction is complete, 11 DuPage County families will have a place to call their own. Shari Denson Frackowiak, a Habitat homeowner, shared her story.

“I think most of all [my happiness] has to do with having a foundation,” she said. “A home.”