



DuPage Habitat breaks ground on 11-home subdivision

By Robert Sanchez | Daily Herald Staff

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DuPage Habitat for Humanity's largest project - an 11-home subdivision with a distinct green flair - is starting to take shape in a West Chicago neighborhood. On Wednesday, earth-moving equipment already was preparing the three-acre site that will become the Pioneer Prairie subdivision when Habitat officials and their partners showed up for the official groundbreaking.

"To actually see the roads, see the gutters, it's hard to deny where we are," Executive Director Sarah Brachle said after the ceremonial turning of dirt. "The fact that we are within a month of starting to put homes in the ground is pretty amazing." The first two houses in the subdivision at the corner of Sherman Street and Pomeroy Court should be ready for families by the end of the year. All the houses will be affordable and energy efficient.

Thanks to collaborations with ComEd and College of DuPage, green-friendly upgrades - such as improved insulation, windows and plumbing - will be incorporated into the construction of each home. Experts from ComEd worked with COD students to develop the recommendations.

"Because of the hard work of the students, the 11 homes will showcase affordable techniques each of us can use to reduce our environmental impact and save on energy costs," said Calvin Butler, a senior vice president with ComEd.

Butler said each Pioneer Prairie homeowner is projected to significantly lower their costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 3,500 pounds annually. "That's the carbon emissions equivalent of preventing 661 gallons of gasoline from being consumed," he said. "And that's a great start for improving our environment in northern Illinois."

Pioneer Prairie, which will be completed over a three-year period, is the cornerstone of DuPage Habitat's plan to build a total of 18 houses across the county. Brachle said the seven other houses are planned for towns hard hit by foreclosures, including Addison, Villa Park and Glendale Heights.

While Habitat had a contract to buy the West Chicago property for three years, construction was stalled as the group tried to raise money. Then, early last year, the county contributed \$1 million to pay for the infrastructure work.

Mary Keating, the county's community development department administrator, said it was "a no-brainer" for DuPage to get involved. "It really embodies that sort of perfect three-legged stool of government, nonprofits and the business community all coming together - all playing to their strengths - for the common purpose of helping families achieve their dream of responsible homeownership," Keating said.

Brachle said the county grant gave the group the "shot in the arm" it needed to continue its capital campaign that so far has raised \$4.2 million of the \$4.4 million required to complete the 18-house plan. "It's been really wonderful in this economy to see how new partners have come to the table and people have gotten creative," she said, adding that some donated products and services. Families selected to participate in the Habitat program are required to assist with the construction of their homes. How much they pay for the house is based on their family income.

Shari Denson Franckowiak, who got her West Chicago home through Habitat, said she's pleased 11 other families will get to experience the joys of ownership.

"It's just a wonderful thing," she said. "I know they have been working on this project for a long time. It's just great that West Chicago is partnering with them. I am very excited."