

Habitat for Humanity of Oakland County moves into Commerce | Spinal Column

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Aspiring homeowners are encouraged to apply



This fall, Habitat Oakland County will build in Commerce Township for the first time, thanks to support from Karma Yoga. Above: Bill Hanson, board member of HFHOC; Tim Ruggles, Habitat executive director/CEO; Katherine Austin, owner, Karma Yoga. (Photo submitted.) BY LYNNE GOLODNER
SPECIAL TO THE SPINAL COLUMN

When the first homeowner moved into her Habitat for Humanity of Oakland County house 20 years ago, she said she felt like she had won the lottery.

Since then, more than 200 families have achieved the American dream of homeownership thanks to the empowerment program through Habitat Oakland County. Homeowners not only purchase their home at an affordable rate, they learn financial literacy, how to maintain a home and other important skills.

This fall, Habitat Oakland County will build in Commerce Township for the first time, thanks to support from Karma Yoga, a business with locations in West Bloomfield and Bloomfield Township, which is raising the funds to build this house.

“This is an exciting partnership on so many levels,” says Tim Ruggles, executive director/CEO of Habitat Oakland County. “Karma Yoga focuses on teaching people balance and alignment in every part of their lives. Habitat seeks to empower people to achieve their dreams of home ownership, with the support and encouragement we all need. We bring the same core values to this endeavor, guided by a higher power to build up our local community by giving a hand up, not a hand out.”

Additionally, a third partner – Lawrence Technological University – will bring cutting-edge

architecture and design to the effort. Habitat already is a leader in building sustainable homes, and now, LTU will bring another level of sophistication with a new design focused on building community as well as family cohesion.

Because Commerce Township is a new locale for Habitat Oakland County, aspiring homeowners who would like to live in the home are encouraged to apply at www.habitatoakland.org/homeownership-online-pre-application form.html.

“We are actively seeking applications from people who are interested in living in Commerce Township,” says Stephanie Osterland, Habitat Oakland’s director of family and community relationships. “Our homeownership program provides an opportunity for those looking to purchase a home who may need some extra support to make their dream come true.”

“While Oakland County is one of the 10 wealthiest counties in the country, we have people in need living here,” Ruggles notes. “In fact, 10 percent of Oakland County residents live in poverty, and another 17 percent are one paycheck away from a financial crisis. For hardworking families having trouble making ends meet, our program empowers them to take concrete steps toward stabilizing their future.”

Building in partnership

Karma Yoga came on board last year, pledging to raise funds and volunteer support to build an entire house.

Inspired by attending Habitat Oakland County’s 2013 annual event, Katherine Austin, Karma’s founder and owner, was moved when she learned that the average age of a homeless person in Oakland County is 9 years old. The mother of three grown sons, Austin says that statistic “was hard for me to hear.”

She passionately brought the issue back to her yoga students, asking them to support Habitat. The next year, she sponsored a table at the annual event. The next step was to galvanize her community to come together to raise enough to build an entire house for a deserving family.

“Our partnership with Habitat Oakland County feels synchronistic,” Austin says. “In yoga, we help people get ‘grounded’ in their life and create a firm ‘foundation’ within a hectic world. The physical practice of yoga teaches people to empower themselves toward a life they desire, are capable of and deserve.”

At the same time that Austin’s passion about becoming involved with Habitat grew, Ruggles discovered the power of a regular yoga practice. Their synergy grew on many levels until it just made sense to work together to build up Oakland County.

“The words ‘Karma Yoga’ mean to be of service,” she continued. “Partnering with Habitat Oakland County is a perfect way to put into action our philosophy and our belief in being of service to our community.”

Habitat for Humanity

Celebrating 20 years in Oakland County, Habitat for Humanity is a grassroots organization dedicated to the elimination of poverty and substandard housing. They have built in Pontiac, Waterford, Davisburg, Southfield, Ferndale and other hamlets across the county.

Habitat accepts donated homes or lots, and builds or renovates them in partnership with qualifying families, who pay an affordable mortgage provided through Habitat.

Worldwide, Habitat has built and renovated more than 1 million houses since 1976. Habitat Oakland County has built and renovated homes for more than 200 individuals and families in Oakland County over the last two decades.

Habitat's vision is a world where everyone has a decent place to live. The nonprofit is driven by this mission: Seeking to put God's love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.

For more information, visit www.habitatoakland.org or call 248-338-1843. Habitat Oakland County is located at 150 Osmun Street, Pontiac.

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