

Port Rotary kicks off Habitat for Humanity project

By MARK TAYTI

There was a great show of community support Friday when Habitat for Humanity broke ground on its first-ever Port Colborne build.

It was a morning of firsts as those gathered on the corner of Main Street East and Westside Road learned that Earl Ruston's donation of land was the largest land donation ever made to Habitat for Humanity Niagara.

The event was punctuated with a huge crane donated by Gerald Oskam, of Edgewater Cranes, that was brought on site to do

some heavy lifting on the large sign - prepared by New Port Signs - to advertise the spring 2008 project and track the donations needed to make the build possible.



Friday, October 6, 2007

The project is being undertaken by the Rotary Club of Port Colborne Centennial, in partnership with the City of Port Colborne, Habitat for Humanity - and hopefully a cast of thousands. "I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to acknowledge the generous contribution of Earl Ruston of not only one but two building lots," Rotary Club president Shelley Campbell said. "He was all in favour of the project as he felt it was a terrific opportunity for the community to get involved and help a family that really has the desire to work hard and be a homeowner when they would otherwise not be able."

Rotary got the project off on a good financial footing earlier this year by pledging \$10,000 to the project.

"Our club is not just raising money for Habitat; we are leading the way with the build committee." She said donations of money and time will be critical if the club is to raise the \$60,000 needed for the first of two homes - not to mention the volunteer manpower to build it.

The club has enlisted the expertise of planner John Conlon and building contractor Roy Shoalts to sit on the build committee with chair Fred Davies. Campbell is chair of the fundraising committee and Port Colborne Rotarian Doug Frazer is project leader.

Other Port Colborne Rotarians are also playing key roles in the build. Lynda Reinhart, Rotarian and executive director of Port Cares, will serve as chair of the family selection committee for the build.

Reinhart said information sessions are planned in Welland at St. David Church on Oct. 18. A second family information session will be held in Port Colborne at Port Cares, 92 Charlotte St., at 6:30 p.m. on Nov. 15.

Reinhart said she is excited about the project. "We are constantly struggling with finding affordable housing for families in this community," she added. During the information sessions, families can pick up application forms and obtain assistance in filling them out. Prospective candidates will need to bring information concerning their income and current housing costs.

For more information on either meeting, call 905-834-3629, ext. 311.

Successful candidates must commit to making payments on an interest-free, geared-to-income mortgage.

No down payment is required but the family must be willing to invest 500 hours in "sweat equity" by doing community service.

"This is truly a hand up, not a hand out," Alastair Davis, chief executive officer at Habitat for Humanity Niagara, said.

"Habitat's programs are about tearing down walls and building bridges and helping families thrive in a host of areas such as a sense of belonging, equality, capability and independence."

Davis said there are currently 5,000 families in Niagara waiting for affordable housing.

"We welcome and invite the entire community to become involved this project. Enthusiasm and assistance from local businesses and individuals will make a lasting impact on the community."

Mayor Vance Badawey also called on the community to get behind the worthwhile project. He plans to make a recommendation to Port Colborne council on Tuesday to waive the city's portion of the development charges for the build. That could lead to a savings of \$16,000 when combined with the region's commitment to waive its development fees. Badawey said Port Colborne is all about people working together to help each other. "Everybody needs to be involved," he said. "Bring out your hammers and your tool belts next April and let's have some fun," the mayor said.