

# Volunteer power!

## Female Diva teams will help Habitat build homes

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Even in tough economic times, local businesses are encouraging their employees to volunteer, making employees and nonprofits very happy.

Kelly Brooks, development coordinator for Habitat for Humanity of St. Charles County, knows of several local companies that offer employees time to participate in community service projects and match funds contributed by their employees.

"Gen Y is a very service-oriented generation, and volunteering is becoming more and more popular, even in times of difficulty," she said.

This can be seen in the number of volunteers interested in "Divas Building Dreams," the county chapter's first-ever "Women Build," a program designed by Habitat for Humanity International, where 95 percent of the volunteers are women.

So far there are 30 teams made up of 700 volunteers.

The women will work together to build one house in St. Peters this year. Habitat recently purchased 14 fully developed lots off of Salt Lick Road for its development, the Enclaves of Eisenhower.

A formal groundbreaking will be held at 9 a.m. Saturday, May 9, on Valley View Drive.

Brooks pointed to a workplace survey conducted by Cone Inc., which found that 62 percent of workers want to work for companies that give them a chance to use

their skills to help a nonprofit.

"More companies are pushing this each year," she said.

Such local employers include Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Progress West Hospital, General Motors and Meyer Real Estate, she said.

A number of local businesses have Diva teams this year, including Brown Smith and Wallace, SYSCO, 1st Financial Federal Credit Union, Lowe's in O'Fallon and Covidien.

"Our mission goes with Habitat's mission that it's not a hand out but a hand up," said Michelle R. Rosner, vice president of marketing for 1st Financial Federal Credit Union in Wentzville and captain of the firm's team, The Building Bombshells.

The firm has been involved with Habitat for several years.

1st Financial pledged \$30,000 to HFHSC to help fund the Changing Lives, Building Lives capital campaign in 2006, and the credit union's president and CEO, Nina Pilger, served on the HFHSCC board of directors from 2006 to 2009.

Rosner said the credit union has had a volunteer program for a number of years in which all employees are given paid volunteer hours. Though current economic conditions have made it necessary for the firm to reduce those hours, she said Pilger is still paying employees to volunteer for Habitat.

"I think it's amazing that she said we'll still do this," Rosner said. The Building Bombshells team has scheduled two build days and will schedule one or two more depending on the season, she said.

Mandi Hill, leader of Brown Smith Wallace's Diva team, said that what she likes most about her firm is that employees recommend charitable organizations for



Photo courtesy of Habitat for Humanity of St. Charles County

Habitat for Humanity of St. Charles County is participating this year in its first ever "Women Build," a program designed by Habitat for Humanity International, where 95 percent of the volunteers are women. Shown above are some of the county's "Divas Building Dreams." From left are Allison Clark, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans; Chris Hoffman, Habitat Board Member; Mayor Pam Fogarty, Dardenne Prairie; Kelly Brooks, Habitat Development Coordinator; Wendy Brown, Women Build - Future Homeowner; Skylar Brown, Women Build - Future Homeowner; Carol Meyer, United Methodist Coalition; Tracy Schott, Lowe's Home Improvement; Ashlee Johnson, Habitat Executive Director; and Michelle Tucker, Bank of America.

volunteer opportunities and financial contributions. Each employee has the opportunity to contribute time through the annual "Day of Caring" in which the firm pays employees for volunteering for four hours in the community.

Hill, the audits department supervisor, said that the volunteer work she has done through working at BSW has helped her grow as a person.

"A couple hours can make you feel so much better for yourself and helps others tremendously," Hill said.

"It is amazing to see all of those people who don't really know who I am but want to help someone," said Wendy Brown, who will live in the house with

her 9-year old daughter.

Brown, a single parent, works at St. Charles Community College in the workforce development department as an administrative secretary.

As part of the program, Brown has to put in 175 sweat equity hours, with another 175 hours from her family and friends. She will also be responsible for paying on a 30-year mortgage.

She said building and owning a home will empower her and give her daughter a good example.

"It shows if you work hard you can accomplish things," she said. "You don't have to be a man; you just have to be shown how."