



# NORTHWESTERN WAYNE THE POST

Your hometown newspaper

The Post Newspapers are delivered  
**FREE**  
to every home in  
West Salem, Congress, Burbank  
and surrounding communities,  
a total of over  
**69,000**  
homes each week.

thepostnewspapers.com

National award winning newspapers since 1975

Sunday, September 10, 2006

## Close to home

Habitat for Humanity builds new home in West Salem for the 11-member Blake family

By: Nichole Smith

WEST SALEM – Raising a family and giving them a safe, stable and comfortable place to call their own can be hard enough on parents – but imagine if you are a parent of nine children. How do you find a place big enough to give everyone what they need – comfort, stability, and room to move about without being cramped together?

That's exactly what Gary and Julie Blake had been trying to figure out until Habitat for Humanity in Wayne County answered their prayers and stepped in to lend a hand.

When the couple got married two years ago, blending together two families into a single large one, they knew that becoming a family could be stressful enough but trying to figure out a way to fit 11 people into a three-bedroom house was next to impossible. Then Julie heard about Habitat for Humanity of Wayne County from an acquaintance and decided to put in an application.

"Julie and I were just beside ourselves trying to figure out how we were going to do this," Gary Blake said of the family's living situation.

The biggest obstacle was finding a suitable place for nine children to live. The couple was faced with the struggle of trying to find someone that was willing to rent to them, an obstacle that was not easily overcome.

"Just finding a comfortable home to give everyone some space was the biggest problem," Gary said. "We're just a pick-up game waiting to happen."

Unfortunately, big families are no longer considered the norm in our society and, to the Blake family, having a home for the two families to become one cohesive unit was the most important thing. Both Gary and Julie knew that they wanted to stay in Northwestern School District, because they loved the schools, the people and the community. With the children heavily



Photo by NICHOLE SMITH

Gary and Julie Blake recently found a solution for their biggest problem – combining two families into one large, 11-member unit. Thanks to the Wayne County Habitat for Humanity and community volunteers, the newly blended family can now live comfortably in a house big enough for the nine children and their parents.

involved in sports in the district, staying in West Salem seemed like the natural thing to do. So, they were thrilled when Habitat for Humanity selected their application and began the task of helping the family to build a home.

Gary says that this experience has truly been a blessing for his family. He also adds that the outpouring of community support has been wonderful.

"We were very surprised after sitting down with Habitat and explaining our needs... they didn't even bat an eye," he said. "Between the volume of volunteers, from the Habitat for Humanity staff to the contractors, this has just been an amazing experience."

Habitat for Humanity International celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The non-profit organization began in 1986 and has built more than 200,000 homes. Wayne County alone recently finished its 50th home, as well as its own version of "Extreme Makeover Home Edition," when Habitat built a home from the ground up in just one week. The organization is also getting ready to begin two more homes in Wayne County and is always in need of volunteers.

The homes that are built are not donated to the family, but instead purchased from Habitat for Humanity with a \$350 down payment and a zero percent interest rate for the life of the loan. A family who purchases a home from Habitat is also required to put in 250 hours of "sweat equity" per adult. The process can take an average of two years from start to finish. Habitat for

**"Between the volume of volunteers...to the contractors, this has just been an amazing experience."**

— Gary Blake, homeowner

Humanity also provides financial education classes as part of the process for its families to ensure that they have all the tools to be successful homeowners.

Larry Hughes of Habitat for Humanity in Wayne County says that this is the first time the county has built a home this big. The Blake Family house, which sits on 4 acres just outside of downtown West Salem, boasts six bedrooms, two bathrooms, an attached one-car garage, and has 2,044 square feet of living space.

Hughes went on to add that the 4 acres on which the house sits was purchased from Paul Eicher, the Blakes' new neighbor. He also explained that although the majority of the materials are donated and most work is done by volunteers, some work and materials are discounted greatly.

Two of the donors to the Blake house are Schmidt Service Now, which donated not just the furnace for the home but also the air conditioning unit, and Denny Frazier of Dutch Country Stone, who willingly donated all of the stone used on the house and the labor as well.

Both Hughes and the Blake family agree that none of this would be possible without the time and commitment of the volunteers. Currently the volunteer crews work every Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday, and

not everyone involved is an experienced carpenter.

"We have volunteers from all walks of life," explained Hughes.

With the outside of the house completed and drywall already hung in the upstairs part of the home, Hughes hopes the family will be able to move in by Thanksgiving. There are even a few small trees and shrubs that were also donated planted temporarily in front of the house, just waiting for the time to be given permanent roots.

Gary Blake summed up how blessed the family felt by saying: "When God puts his hand in there... you can accomplish anything."

To learn more about Habitat for Humanity and how to volunteer, donate or to apply for an application, visit the Habitat for Humanity in Wayne County Web site at [www.waynehabitat.org](http://www.waynehabitat.org). Web viewers can also see a pictorial diary of the progress on the Blake house; simply click on the link The Restore House.

In the meantime, Julie Blake shuttles all of the children back and forth to school and practice from their temporary home in Brunswick, patiently waiting for the day when they, too, like the trees and shrubs outside, can make permanent roots in their new home.



### BOBCAT BLITZ Football team off to great start

Players tally 93 points in first two contests, coach is pleased with performance so far.

►12-13



### LIFESTYLE Updating your fall wardrobe

These autumn must-have accessories will make your clothing more fashionable.

►21

### Freelancers wanted

The Post Newspapers are currently seeking local freelance writers and photographers

Earn spare time cash helping write for The Post – do your community and yourself a favor at the same time. If you have good writing and/or photography skills and are interested in freelance work with The Post, please e-mail:

[mtrogdon@thepostnewspapers.com](mailto:mtrogdon@thepostnewspapers.com)