Giving Back: Habitat for Humanity

The Habitat for Humanity project was one of many developed for the Agricultural Engineering Technology Seminar course. Students proposed volunteering for the non-profit to gain experience in structural design, construction techniques, service learning and the joy of donating their time and skills. This is the third semester students have volunteered for Habitat, helping to build at least two new home constructions.

Habitat for Humanity is one of the best experiences I have ever had. The project took place in Spring Valley where we constructed a duplex for two families. Our main task was framing the main floor. Using the skills I learned from helping my brother who is a carpenter, I was able to work skillfully and efficiently. I feel that helping the community is very important. Anyone who is capable of using a hammer should offer their time when opportunities like this arise in the community. I know I will definitely come back to Habitat for Humanity next year. The next time I have the opportunity to use my skills, I will be the first to sign up.  — Jordan Mallmann

I had a very positive experience working with Habitat for Humanity. I had heard of this organization before, however I never knew how exactly they functioned and what it meant to volunteer and help build a house. It was very interesting to see many people my age from different schools helping with the project as well. It was always a light, cheerful atmosphere and that made the work much more enjoyable. The entire organization seems very well run and I was impressed with how smoothly things went, considering the variety of skill levels. The only disappointment of this project was the terrible spring weather that left us with only one day to work on the house. At least the weather that time was perfect. I really enjoyed this experience, and would not pass up the chance to become involved again.  — Rusty Slattery
Working with Habitat for Humanity was an amazing experience. It was great to volunteer for something that would ultimately provide shelter for an entire family – a place they could call home. It was gorgeous weather and Habitat had good work for us as well. I was working with Melissa and Rusty on taking the forms off the concrete foundation for the garage. We started with the outside forms and got those done quickly. Once we got to the inside of the concrete foundation, we had a tricky time getting some of the forms off. The concrete had spilled onto the bottom of the forms and dried, making it difficult to get the bolts off in order to take the forms out. We ended up having to dig and use a large hammer to break the concrete. It was tough but we had a good group and used a lot of problem solving. We finally got them all out just before we left which was a very rewarding feeling. Over all, this was an amazing experience and I enjoyed it a lot.  

– Kelsey Peterson

This semester I worked on the Habitat for Humanity house in Spring Valley, Wisconsin. I fastened LVL’s or laminated veneer lumber to the top of the inside basement walls. When I was finished, I mounted hangers to the LVL so that the floor joists would be supported. When we finished, we began setting in the floor joists for the main level of the house. In order to do this we worked in groups. Working on a project like this really helps build teamwork skills as well as the ability to actively communicate between co-workers. I believe that these skills, as well as the house building skills will come in handy in the future in any kind of position. It was a great experience.  

– Justin Gillis
This past weekend a small group and I from the Ag Engineering Seminar class went to Spring Valley, Wisconsin to help on a house being built by Habitat for Humanity. I worked on building the first stages of the main level floor. We installed cut to length LVL (laminated Veneer lumber) on the top side of the inner basement walls. This board will later be used to hang floor joists across the open basement. A special plate was imbedded in the concrete while the walls were being poured in order to fasten the board. Self tapping screws went through a hanger, the LVL, and the steel plate imbedded in the wall using an electric drill. Each one of these brackets held eight screws and was placed every two feet in order to adequately support the floor. We then helped hang the actual floor joists and built a temporary beam for the joists that were spanning the whole length of the building. I had never done any of these things on a building before so I learned a lot and really enjoyed spending the day outside in the beautiful weather volunteering for a good cause.

– Tyler Tesmer

Working for Habitat for Humanity I have gained a better knowledge on how a house is constructed. We worked on removing concrete forms for the garage and installed sill plates and floor joists. I learned how to install Simpson Strongties and joist hangers. My experience working for Habitat has helped me gain a better understanding of the construction process. I have learned that having a laid out plan is key in order to reach your final product and goals. Some of the work was challenging, but it was all worth it because of the experience and the fact that it was for a good cause. I believe that by working for Habitat for Humanity I have gained a greater sense of accomplishment in helping out the community and those less fortunate. This experience will help me consider others’ needs more in the future and help out where I can. This experience has also helped me understand the construction process more, which will help me secure a job in the future. Overall it was an awesome experience with a great group of individuals that can’t be beat.

– Mike Benzschawel