

Habitat for Humanity Walks For Affordable Housing in Centre County

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by Zach Berger

The sun shone down on Tudek Memorial Park on Sunday afternoon as a group of dedicated volunteers and supporters walked through the grass.

They walked for those less fortunate in Centre County, those who can't afford to buy their own home because of financial hardship.

About 40 walkers participated in the annual event, which raises money for the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Centre County. The HouseWalk aims to help put families in homes with an affordable mortgage.

"Affordable housing continues to be a hot topic issue in the Centre County region," says Jill Redman, the organization's executive director.

"Habitat continues to be one of the few organizations that serves families. The importance of it is that there's really very few opportunities for them. They are families that would not qualify for a traditional mortgage."

Redman says Habitat's mission is to lessen the burden on less-privileged families to allow them to focus on the other aspects of life.

"It's an amazing opportunity to provide that stable home environment, which ultimately enriches the rest of their lives," she says. "They have stability in their home and allows them to focus on other areas of their lives and their kids' lives and things like that."

The HouseWalk raised \$5,600 on Sunday, money that will go toward renovations on two homes that will eventually house two Habitat partner families. The walk has become a tradition for the organization, and Redman describes it as a "low-key event with more dedicated volunteers and supporters."

One such volunteer is Cecilia Eastman, who says the work Habitat does is important not just for financial assistance but also because it raises awareness for a pressing and prevalent issue.

"There are so many families in our community that really need this kind of support. From a community aspect, I'm really interested in helping the good work they do," Eastman says. "Sometimes the families that need this support are kind of invisible in communities like this, so calling attention to their needs is very important."

Joan Wertz also came out to the park to support Habitat and participate in the HouseWalk. Wertz says that Habitat's work helps boost the confidence and spirit of those in need of housing.

"You need organizations like Habitat. The people can't see and figure out all the facets of home ownership," she says. "There's no way they would be able to walk through that maze by themselves. And then Habitat encourages them to give back through work equity, which build their self esteem because they're able to help others."

"People who are stuck renting forever are able to get into their own home and take so much pride in



home ownership and themselves and what they can accomplish," Wertz adds. "It boosts the whole person's self-morale."

While events like the HouseWalk are integral for Habitat's continued success and impact in Centre County, Redman says the organization also needs help from local government to push for more affordable housing.

"The local jurisdictions can help pave the way. A lot of them have done a good job drafting zoning ordinances that require an affordable housing option in new developments," she says. "Every developer or builder ultimately has to make the decision if they're building for families in our income bracket or outside of it. The townships can continue to be supportive and thoughtful by pushing their hand to include affordable housing."

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