

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity

Rebuilding and “ReStore”-ing the Jersey Shore Community

by Jill Ocone

Everyone needs a foundation to build a future and deserves to have a decent life. Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity in Toms River is helping the Jersey Shore community do both. Since 2000, Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity has revitalized Jersey Shore neighborhoods by repairing and building homes and providing a sense of both inclusiveness and stewardship through volunteerism and collaboration.

“It’s people helping people and neighbors helping neighbors. That’s what Habitat is all about,” said Executive Director Suzan Fichtner. She said that bringing individuals, businesses, volunteers, and civic/

school/non-profit groups together builds communities, homes, and hope.

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity has several different programs and initiatives all with the goal of helping northern Ocean County neighbors attain a better future and a decent life.

New Construction with Home Ownership

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity works with qualified low-income families to help them realize the dream of owning their own home through a “hands-up, not hand-out” model in which homeowners actually assist in building their own home, which they then purchase from Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity. Families put in hundreds of so-called “sweat hours” working alongside volunteers to build their home, then they have the unique opportunity of

paying an affordable mortgage and building equity after purchasing it. Fichtner explained that home ownership improves the quality of life for both the family and the community. “Since 2000, Northern Ocean Habitat has constructed nineteen new homes for hard-working people in the Jersey Shore community,” she said. “We provide a decent, affordable, and safe home for homeowners while touching the hearts of volunteers, neighbors, local businesses, municipalities, sponsors, and foundations that help.”

Fichtner also said that homeownership leads to stability for everyone in the family, but most importantly, for children. “We see the return on our investment in security and stability for children who, as a result of having a 1,200-square-foot home to call their own, aspire for college and beyond. Having that home changes the tide of their lives.”

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courtesy of Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity



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Right: A new homeowner and her daughters.
Opposite page and below: Habitat volunteers build a new home.



courtesy of Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity

Home Repair Programs

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity offers a variety of home repair programs that alleviate critical health and safety issues while completing necessary home improvement projects for eligible applicants.

“When people live on a fixed income, have medical issues with a high mortgage payment, along with insurance premiums, tax payments, and a high cost of living for basic necessities, there’s no money left for repairs,” Fichtner explained. “We want our seniors to be ‘Aging in Place’ where they can stay longer in their own home while preserving their dignity, safety, health, and well-being.”

The **“Critical Home Repair Program”** helps low-income homeowners who struggle to maintain the structural integrity of their homes because of disability, age, or family circumstances. Critical home repair projects can include water leaks, bathroom and doorway/hallway modifications that are ADA-compliant for walker and wheelchair accessibility, railings and grab bar installations, mold remediation, and more.

The **“Home Preservation Program”** focuses on exterior revitalization and repair services for homeowners who work alongside volunteers.

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity reached the milestone of their two hundredth home repair in December 2018 with repairs to the home of a disabled eighty-five-year-old Korean War veteran and his wife in the Lake Riviera section of Brick. Volunteers replaced sheetrock, installed new floors, replaced crumbling concrete stairs, and replaced a deteriorating bathroom. “Many of their accessibility issues were rectified,” Fichtner said. “The family shared their story, made coffee for the volunteers, and interacted with them on a daily basis. That’s a hands-up for sure.”

All applicants for both home repair and home ownership programs must meet income eligibility and other criteria. Many times applications for



The ReStore is located at 1214 Route 37 East in Toms River.

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assistance are completed by neighbors, family members, friends, and community members as the first step to help someone they know who is having difficulty maintaining their home on their own.

Disaster Relief

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity helps communities affected by disasters by providing shelter assistance, education and training, and partnerships with affected individuals and families. “While we were active in the community before, our Sandy relief and response really propelled us big time. It was then we realized we were capable of providing so many much-needed critical home repairs,” Fichtner said. With Ocean County being one of the hardest hit communities, we assisted in the rebuilding efforts of over sixty Sandy-impacted homes, most of which included rebuilding after gutting the home down to the studs.

How To Help

There are countless ways one can help Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity. “For us to do what we do for our community, it takes a village. We cannot do this alone,” Fichtner said.

The ReStore

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore, staffed by vol-

unteers, is a retail business with a mission. The ReStore offers fabulous merchandise at great prices with all proceeds benefiting organization initiatives and programs. Everything for sale at ReStore comes from donations. “It’s a win-win situation, because donating to ReStore keeps things out of the landfills and is a major resource for making a house a home.” All items go through a system of checks and balances to ensure everything is clean and in the best condition possible before being offered for sale.

The ReStore is neatly arranged and organized like a high-end home boutique. Browsers will find everything from furniture to kitchen utensils to home and seasonal décor available to purchase at unbelievable prices. “Our customers range from treasure hunters and collectors, to do-it-yourselfers looking for their next table to paint, to people on a fixed income who just need the basic necessities,” Fichtner said. “The reality is we have tons of glassware, but we can’t keep pots and pans on the shelves.” In addition to pots and pans, holiday decorations and bedroom sets are also in high demand. Fichtner added, “Inventory is added daily. We post new items for sale regularly on our Facebook page, and oftentimes they are sold within an hour of the post going live.” Buyers should keep in mind that ReStore items are sold on a first-

come, first-served in-store basis and cannot be held or reserved.

The ReStore director, Marian Hodavance, began as a volunteer and is in awe of the impact both the ReStore and Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity has had on the local community. "When you get a lady who comes in and hugs you just because she could never afford a washing machine for her family on her own before, well, that's just unbelievably rewarding," she said. Hodavance is in charge of coordinating donations and volunteers to man the store. Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity recently relocated their offices to the ReStore location creating a one-stop housing resource center.

The Padlocks for Patriots Initiative

Habitat's Repair Corps program funds critical repairs on the homes of military veterans (provided they have received an honorable or general discharge). The "Padlocks for Patriots" initiative is a way to honor a veteran and raise funds for veteran home repairs in northern Ocean County. Supporters purchase a padlock for \$25. to honor or memorial-

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ize a veteran they know. The lock is engraved with the supporter's personal message and then locked onto the Habitat's American flag fence inside the ReStore. All funds raised through this initiative are used for veteran repairs and homeowner programs. Locks can be purchased directly at the ReStore or online at www.nohfh.com/padlocks.

Volunteers, Partnerships, and Monetary Donations

There are many volunteer opportunities available at Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity including construction, retail/ReStore, fundraising, committees, and more. Volunteers not only help with the organization's mission but also build connections and relationships with other volunteers. "We are blessed with a really wonderful and supportive community, but we can always use more," Fichtner said. Individuals who are

interested in volunteering should first complete the online application.

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity is proud to have the support of many community partners including Provident Bank, OceanFirst Bank, Amboy Bank, Playa Bowls, Lowes, Ferguson Plumbing Supply, Avalon Flooring, Family First Funding, Jersey Coast Appliance, Amara Dental, and the American Red Cross, as well as school affiliate chapters at Brick Memorial High School, Donovan Catholic High School, Manchester Township High School, Toms River High School South, and Georgian Court University, to name a few.

"When you shop at ReStore, donate, or volunteer, you build and repair homes in your community. I invite you to make a difference with us in whatever way you can," urged Fichtner. ♦



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Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity's offices and the ReStore are located at 1214 Route 37 East in Toms River. For more information, call (732) 818-9500 or visit www.nohfh.com or www.nohfh.com/restore. You can also find the ReStore on Facebook at: facebook.com/habitatrestore. The ReStore is open Tuesday - Saturday, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Individuals, businesses, and civic/school organizations who are interested in becoming a community partner or holding a fundraiser should call (732) 818-9500.

Monetary donations are accepted online and in person at the ReStore. Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, tax exempt organization under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Those interested in donating to the ReStore should first consult the list of accepted items, which can be found at the ReStore's website. Donations can be dropped off at the ReStore. For larger donations, fill out the "pick up request" form online. For more information, contact Marian Hodavance at (732) 818-9500 ext. 101.

Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity serves the following Ocean County communities: Bay Head, Beachwood, Berkeley/Bayville, Brick, Island Heights, Jackson, Lakehurst, Lakewood, Lavallette, Manchester/Whiting, Mantoloking, Ocean Gate, Pine Beach, Plumsted, Point Pleasant, Point Pleasant Beach, Seaside Heights, Seaside Park, South Toms River, and Toms River.



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