

# Habitat gives families new start

By **ERIK HARTMAN** Assistant Campus Editor | Posted: Wednesday, February 1, 2012 10:00 am

One of the largest student organizations on campus is looking to change common misunderstanding associated with their group.

According to members of Habitat for Humanity, many people believe the organization just builds homes and gives them away for free to families. That is not the case.

Jessica Brooks, a single mother and soon-to-be recipient of the current Habitat for Humanity project in Lafayette, agreed there is definitely a stereotype associated with the organization.

“When I say ‘I’m getting a Habitat house,’ a lot of people think it’s free and I’m not getting a free house,” Brooks said. “You have to do 250 hours (of construction work) to get your house. I love it – coming out here and working on my house because you get (to) say later on, ‘I worked on my house.’ You can look at it and say ‘I put that nail in.’”

Emily Loehrlein, a junior in the College of Health and Human Sciences and Purdue Habitat for Humanity’s vice president of development, said the organization is more than just lending a hand to someone in need.

“It’s not just giving a house away,” Loehrlein said. “It’s helping someone get back on their own again and helping them continue their life.”

Although the recipients are getting a home, she said, they are still responsible for the financial aspects of owning the home.

“They’re still paying the mortgage rates and it’s still their house,” said Loehrlein. “It makes it affordable for them.”

Brooks agreed the organization makes it more affordable and stresses it’s not just a free house given away when someone needs one.

“It’s not a handout you know, they don’t just give it to you,” she said. “You have to work for it.”

Brooks added she loves the atmosphere present when she comes out to work with the students on her house.

“It’s all like family,” she said. “I just love it. They make you appreciate (what you are getting).”

For students working with Habitat for Humanity, being able to see this response and joy from the people they help makes it easy to come back each time.

Alex Smatt, a senior in the College of Science and construction co-chair for Habitat for Humanity,

said for him, it's seeing the difference that can be made just by showing up to help out.

"It's just the difference that you can see," he said. "You slowly see what your input does and you see how it makes a difference to the family, you know. That's why I keep doing it."

Smatt said being able to work every week and watch the progress on the house is great, but what they give is the real accomplishment.

"We come out and spend our time," Smatt added, "but what is that compared to giving someone a house and a better life?"