

# THEY CAME. THEY SAWED. THEY HAMMERED.

By Rick Peterson



It was a bit of a “Friedman” moment for Kristin Morgan ’09. The dedication ceremonies in early December celebrating the completion of the first Habitat for Humanity home built in Appleton primarily by Lawrence students left her contemplating author Thomas Friedman’s notion that the world is indeed “flat.”

“To achieve the goal of building this house seemed to be an example of the ‘flattening world’ and the empowerment of smaller groups and individuals to make a difference,” said Morgan, a government major from Ocala, Fla., who doubles as student president of the campus Habitat for Humanity (HFH) chapter. “Liberal arts education prepares students to be actively engaged citizens with the broad background and cross-over between disciplines. This was a direct opportunity to apply and engage our world perspectives.”

Beginning in early October, teams of dedicated Lawrence students, ranging from fraternity brothers and sorority sisters to members of Lawrence International and the men’s basketball team, as well as some faculty and staff members — more than 220 individuals in all — dutifully made thrice-a-week pilgrimages for four-hour work shifts to the nearby Habitat work site on Appleton’s northeast side. Over the course of two months, they collectively transformed a vacant lot into a three-bedroom, 1,300-square-foot, landscaped home for a family of six from Bosnia.

A “bookend” volunteer who showed up on the first day of construction and the last day of final clean-up, Lucy Moser ’11 did everything from helping with the foundation to hanging exterior siding. But the Glenview, Ill., freshman came away from the project with more than improved handyman skills.

“Having opportunities to work several times with the family, I gained a better understanding of a totally different lifestyle,” said Moser. “To see their dedication and how hard they worked for their new home and their new life was truly inspirational.”

Construction was completed in 10 weeks, but the Lawrence Habitat build was actually six years in the making. Starting in 2002, students began raising the requisite co-sponsorship funds — \$20,000 — by turning the Main Hall green into a temporary shantytown one weekend each May through the annual “Shack-A-Thon” project.

When J.J. Keller & Associates, Inc., a long-time supporter of the Greater Fox Cities Area HFH, decided to co-sponsor a “Youth Build” house, they knew finding the appropriate partner was critical to the project’s success.

“In reviewing all the criteria we were looking for, the one school that stood head and shoulders above the rest was Lawrence University,” said J.J. Keller’s Tom Cherrier. “Looking back, this Youth Build project greatly exceeded our

expectations. It was very rewarding to witness so many Lawrence students, faculty, and staff getting involved. The success really demonstrates what students can accomplish when given the opportunity."

The collective success of the project produced individual triumphs as well.

"It was such a personally rewarding experience because I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and learned something new," said Ranelle Graber, '11, Oregon, Wis., who became well acquainted with the band saw and nail gun during her 50 hours of volunteer service on the project. "I have a new sense of teamwork, having learned how even a little help can go a long way."

Chuck Demler '11, New Berlin, Wis., made the most of his self-described rudimentary carpentry skills to hang doors and install windows during a half dozen trips to the site. He found the opportunity to move beyond a latte and coffee shop conversations about poets and authors refreshing.

"We're really good about talking about ideas at Lawrence, but this was all about getting out there and actually doing something," said Demler. "We took things we learn in the classroom about social change and applied them in the real world."

Lawrence Vice President for Enrollment Steve Syverson, who also serves as chair of the Greater Fox Cities Area HFH board of directors and advisor to the Lawrence HFH chapter, hailed the project as "a great example of community-engaged learning."

"This sort of experience helps to prepare our students for lives of good citizenship with compassion for those who are less fortunate and an understanding that they can personally make a difference," said Syverson. "The project clearly galvanized the chapter, as well as many others on campus, and increased community appreciation of Lawrence and our students."



## LAWRENCE KNITTERS "STITCH" IN ON HABITAT PROJECT

Hammers, screwdrivers, and paintbrushes weren't the only tools involved in the Lawrence co-sponsored Habitat for Humanity project. Several sets of knitting needles expertly wielded by the "Knit Wits" also were put to good use. The group of 12 Lawrence University staff members, who meet once a week on their lunch hour, knitted an afghan of 36 squares of different patterns, presenting it as a gift to Hamed Husic's family at the house dedication ceremony. "When we learned about the Lawrence Habitat project, we grabbed our tools and went to work," said Knit Wit member Jody Fraleigh, functional support manager in the information technology services department. "We hoped the afghan would be welcomed by the family as both a house-warming gift and another expression of support from the Lawrence community."





**LEFT:** The Husic family, left to right: Hamed, Hasib, Mediha, Meliha, Rahima, and Amela

## THE HUSIC FAMILY'S "HAPPIEST DAY"

Amela Husic didn't need to think long or hard on what excited her most about her family's new home. "I have my own room!" the 14-year old exclaimed. Amela is one of six members of the Husic family living in the Lawrence co-sponsored Habitat for Humanity home. Refugees from Bosnia, the Husics emigrated from Lukavac to Appleton in 2001 and had shared a two-bedroom apartment before moving into their new home in December.

Amela is being raised by her older brother, Hamed, 31, the Husic family patriarch. She was left an orphan after her father died in the war between Bosnia and Serbia and her mother died shortly after she was born. In addition to her sister-in-law, Rahima, Hamed's wife, Amela shares the home with her two nieces, Meliha, 8, and baby Mediha, born in the summer of 2007, and her nephew, Hasib, 6.

Beaming with his own excitement prior to the official dedication ceremonies, Hamed called it "the happiest day since we arrived in the United States."

Perhaps no one took more satisfaction in the project's completion than Beth Halpern '02, even if it was from afar. Halpern founded the campus chapter of HFH in 1999 and soon after began discussions of one day building a Lawrence-sponsored home.

"I was thrilled to see this idea finally came to fruition six years after leaving Appleton," said Halpern, director of community service and civic engagement at Pennsylvania's Muhlenberg College. "More than anything, I'm glad to see current Lawrentians interested in the issue of affordable housing and committed to creating change in the community. The partnership between the Fox Cities HFH affiliate and Lawrence's campus chapter illustrates the positive impact a reciprocal relationship can have on a community."

On the heels of completing their first house, 14 student members of HFH are planning their first international project, a spring break trip to Sonsonate, El Salvador to build earthquake-resistant homes as part of ongoing recovery efforts from Hurricane Mitch. ■

