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Sweat equity pays off

Jiménez family pitched in to help build their Habitat for Humanity home

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Guillermo Mario Jiménez unloads the moving truck at his family's new home in Everett.

KEVIN CLARK / THE HERALD

BY ANDREA BROWN
Herald Writer

EVERETT —Almost every Saturday for 10 months, they were there. And often during the week.

Hammering, framing, drywalling, siding, caulking, painting. Working in the rain or inside a structure with no creature comforts.

It's called sweat equity for a reason.

From the ground up, Anna and Guillermo Jiménez toiled

alongside Habitat for Humanity volunteers to build the home that became their own in June.

"It's kind of like watching a child grow. You don't notice the subtle differences, but then all of a sudden there's a house," Anna said.

The three-bedroom home has a big yard and long driveway where their sons, Guillermo David, 7, and Josue Mario, 2, can zip along on bikes and kick balls. It is tucked behind apartment complexes on busy 112th Street SE near Silver Lake.

This is the 26th house built in 26 years by Habitat for Humanity of Snohomish County to provide home ownership to lower-income families. Habitat builds and rehabs houses offered at cost, with a second mortgage in place to prevent flipping the home for a profit.

The Jiménez home is the first phase of Twin Creeks Village in south Everett and the only single-family home planned in the project with as many as 24 townhouses. Because of the need for housing, the others will

be fourplexes, said John Budd, board president.

This is the largest project this chapter has undertaken and involves three parcels of property, he said. The targeted date for completion is 2023.

"The opportunity came up with the land being available about three years ago," Budd said. "The timing worked out

well and for us the cost worked out well. We bought two lots and the bank donated one lot.

Total cost out of our pocket was about \$600,000."

The nonprofit is seeking applicants for the first four-plex of townhouses slated to begin later this year. Informational sessions are planned in August for the two- and three-bedroom units.

The sweat equity as a down payment is a minimum of 500 hours per family, with 200 hours on their own home.

"Four units will be built at once," Budd said. "It's an opportunity for them to help their neighbors."

All projects are funded by donations, including time and materials. "We are hoping to get more partners from the community," Budd said. "This will be roughly a \$5 million project."

That doesn't include details such as feeding the crews.

In addition to slinging a hammer, Anna would bring over chili or lasagna for the volunteers.

"Different groups would show up," she said. "It's crazy how a lot of people who don't know how to build a house can contribute to build a wonderful house."

The couple met as students in Honduras, where Guillermo lived. Anna is from Colorado. Both worked for nonprofits after college. They moved to Washington five years ago for his job in the Seattle office of Agros International, which helps people in Central America and Mexico.

"It's about land ownership for rural families," he said of Agros. "They end up owning their land and so they can sell (goods) to market. They also

build houses and put water systems in place. We build villages, essentially."

He faced housing issues in Washington. The family settled in Everett for cheaper rent but still could only afford a small two-bedroom apartment near a transit center so Guillermo, 36, could commute by bus.

Coincidentally, their new home is down the street from their former apartment where they lived for five years.

Home ownership the traditional way was not feasible for the couple who, with one income, found themselves priced out of the housing market. The home median price

in Snohomish County is \$485,000, according to the Northwest Multiple Listing Service.

"For us, renting an apartment was within our reach," she said. "Saving for a down payment would

have been so long it would have never been."

The couple entered the selection process for a Habitat home about a year ago. They attended a series of workshops and filled out multiple applications. Candidates must meet income guidelines and be able to qualify for a mortgage.

Habitat designed the two-story house with an unfinished basement. The couple were given options in flooring, wall color, outside color and some inside upgrades.

The gray house has 2.5 bathrooms, a two-car garage and wide hallways.

"It's life-changing for us," said Anna, 37. "It's so over the top. It feels like a miracle. Moving from a tiny apartment to here. Having more than one bathroom or being able to have company over. It's all the little things."

She and Guillermo look forward to having neighbors in what are now empty lots. Kids for their sons to ride bikes with. Adults to befriend.

They plan to lend a hand when construction resumes in their village.

"Now it feels like our weeks are longer because we have an extra day — Saturday," he said.

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HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF SNOHOMISH COUNTY
Twin Creeks Village on 112th Street SE is an area of townhomes being built by Habitat for Humanity.



KEVIN CLARK / THE HERALD Anna Jiménez hands items to her son, Guillermo David, as her husband, Guillermo Mario, makes his way up the ramp in the moving truck.