



April 24, 2020

This has been a whirlwind of a week at Habitat. We've been rapidly solidifying partnerships with outstanding organizations like *Cville Craft Aid* and *Meals on Wheels* in order to help our community neighbors through the COVID-19 crisis. Some of our work redeploying resources to provide immediate relief to families was covered by [The Daily Progress](#), [NBC 29](#), [CBS 19](#) and [WINA](#).

And, while our COVID-19 response has been getting most of the attention lately, we continue to build houses while advancing plans to build more. In this week's newsletter, you'll read about how we are safely maintaining building operations while also accelerating other forms of immediate community support as part of our [interim mission](#).

Habitat Keeps Building During COVID-19



Every time a tool is handed off from one worker to another at Harmony Ridge, it is carefully disinfected before being used by someone else.

"We have families who are struggling to shelter safely in place given their living conditions," said Habitat President and CEO Dan Rosensweig. "So, our construction team developed a host of COVID protocols to allow work to continue. Given the emergency need, stopping construction was not an option."

Although all volunteering has been temporarily suspended at job sites during the crisis, Habitat's construction staff and specialty subcontractors are still building houses and new homeowners are still moving in. The work is a bit slower than before, but, through

intensive planning and coordination, [families like the Ibrahimis](#) are moving out of unsafe, overcrowded conditions into brand new homes.

"Only one subcontractor is in a unit at a time, and we are spread out so there's one person per floor to maintain social distance among our crew," says Ken Jollofsky, Habitat's Construction Supervisor.

Habitat's team has also been creative in getting the details done. One staff member has been taking trim home to paint offsite and returning to install it when others aren't working.

As part of its [interim mission](#), Habitat has prioritized finishing ten homes at Harmony Ridge. At the same time, work is also moving ahead on four additional homes on Nassau Street. Despite this forward progress, volunteers are dearly missed.

"Long term, we can't build affordably without volunteers," said Rosensweig. "They are our engine and lifeblood. And, what often gets overlooked is the emotional and spiritual lift our Partner Families experience when total strangers show up to swing a hammer side by side with them."

Jollofsky says that they are "looking at ways of involving volunteers again but haven't been able to make that leap yet."

In addition to finishing almost completed homes during the crisis, Habitat has been laying the groundwork for future builds so that the more than 100 families who have applied or who are already part of Habitat's homebuyers program can stay on a path to safe, decent, affordable housing.

Mandy Burbage, Habitat's Land Development Coordinator, has been able to move emerging projects along at nearly the same rate as before albeit with a few frustrations along the way.

"The most substantial difference in my work flow relates to submitting plans and permits," Burbage says. "Charlottesville's City Hall is closed, is conducting business only through the mail, and will not accept emailed applications or electronic payments for permits. But we are grateful for city staff who continue to serve through the crisis."

Volunteer Spotlight: Sally Pickell Pivots from the Build Site to the Sewing Table



Sally Pickell, who has volunteered over 2,800 hours. Pictured bottom left, Sally and the rest of the Midweek Crew, a skilled team who work weekly with Habitat when the build site is open to volunteers.

Twenty years ago, Sally Pickell helped her son-in-law build a shed.

She had so much fun swinging a hammer that day that she picked up the phone and called Habitat to inquire about volunteering on the jobsite.

"I quickly realized how much I like getting together with people and accomplishing something," says Pickell. "And I strongly believe in the mission." She learned construction skills and, from those early days until the pandemic arrived last month, she reliably volunteered two days each week as part of our mid-week construction crew.

As the virus and the lockdown spread and the jobsite had to be closed to volunteers, Pickell and Habitat remained undeterred. As part of its [interim mission](#) to redeploy resources to support the community through the crisis, Habitat began mass production and distribution of masks to low income community members and to other front line needs.

"I've done a lot of sewing for an organization called [Days for Girls](#)," Pickell says. "We sew and make reusable, non disposable menstrual products for girls and women around the world."

First she made a few masks for friends, family and neighbors. Then she produced a batch of twenty five for her daughter to bring to co-workers. Today she is preparing to deliver a hundred to UVA Hospital where they will be used by non-medical staff and visitors.

During this annual volunteer week we want special friends like Pickell to know how much we appreciate what they do. Whether you are swinging a hammer on a jobsite, or sewing masks, or supporting one of the other indispensable non profit organizations in town, we are honored by your commitment to this community.

"I make sixteen masks each day," Pickell says. "You would never make them one at a time. It's a lot of different steps. You do the same step maybe ten times on

each of them and then go to the next step."

Van Yahres Tree Co. Celebrates Arbor Day in Southwood

One of most prominent features of the Southwood Mobile Home Park is the forest of mature, towering trees that shade the neighborhood. To the community members whose mobile homes sit -- often precariously -- underneath, the trees are a mixed blessing. They are a source of serenity and beauty as well as a constant safety threat. A large branch that might only require a roofing patch job on a conventional house could be fatal if it falls on a tin-roofed trailer.



"It's impossible to visit Southwood without enjoying the lovely canopy," said Southwood Director of Development Rush Otis. "At the same time, continual tree maintenance -- selective pruning -- has been an enormous monthly expense since we purchased Southwood."

Last week, Habitat announced that, thanks to a grant from the Charlottesville Emergency Relief Fund, it is waiving rent for Southwood families for two months as part of its [Interim Mission](#).

"The grant partially offsets ongoing expenses," said Otis. "However, there are a number of immediate health and safety items that need to continue."

And that's where the Van Yahres Tree Company has stepped in. As an act of service for Arbor Day, VYTC is trimming potentially dangerous branches from trees in Southwood at no cost.

"These are tough times," says Shana Clarke, who runs the business along with her brother, Jake Van Yahres. "We know individual businesses, non profits, are really having to take a sharp pencil to their budgets... one thing we want to remind people of is that it really is important to care for your trees right now. Essential tree care would be where a tree has dead limbs and sometimes you can't even see it without a trained eye. We understand that money is tight but any situation that can be a hazard should be a priority."

Van Yahres and Clarke recently took over the business from their father, Mike, to become the fourth generation of the Van Yahres family to operate the 101 year old business. The name is familiar to long-time locals because the business was formerly owned by Mitch Van Yahres, a member of the Virginia House of Delegates who represented Charlottesville from 1981 to 2005 before passing away in 2008.

"Mitch was my grandfather," says Jake. "They say about him, 'he tended trees for a living and people for a lifetime.' One of the foundations [of his legacy is that] we've always tried to give back to kids and the environment. Southwood, it's a community that we try to help out when we can. There are a lot of children there. Since Friday is Arbor Day we're trying to do our part. What we do best is take care of trees."

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