

MORE HEART THAN HAMMER:

Making a House a Home

BY JULIE BUCHWALD HALEY

It takes a lot of heart to make a house into a home. Chat with a couple of Rice County Habitat for Humanity's go-to crew for a few minutes and you'll see just how passionate they are about helping to build affordable homes in Rice County. They will also tell you that it takes an entire community of volunteers to make it happen.

Larry Narhi (known on the job sites as "Larry Two") and Larry Menzel ("Larry Three") do it for love. For the love of the work, the people they work with, the mission of Habitat and teaching others, but most of all they do it for the love of seeing the faces of the new homeowners – especially the kids - when Habitat hands over the keys to their new home.

Narhi spent his professional career as a computer design engineer, retiring from Hewlett-Packard in 2010. He and his wife moved to Northfield later that year and joined Bethel Lutheran Church where they met Wayne Kivell, a Habitat volunteer since 2002.

Kivell suggested Narhi volunteer some of his time and considerable skills to Habitat. Since then, Narhi has helped build roughly 20 homes in Northfield and Faribault. In 2014, he became a construction coordinator responsible for ordering supplies, site supervision, and – as he said - "cajoling volunteers to keep working." He also teaches volunteers how to do everything from putting up siding to laying down flooring.

Menzel spent much of his professional career in financial services with Mutual of Omaha. He retired three years ago and was soon approached by Kivell to volunteer his time and talent for carpentry to Habitat. Menzel says he "showed up on-site with a belt full of tools" and the motivation to "be of service to others," he said. "Volunteering and Habitat get in your blood." He is a safety coordinator and site supervisor, and has helped build at least six homes in Lonsdale, Northfield, and Dundas.

Narhi and Menzel each volunteer 30-40 hours a week with Habitat,



Volunteers from Cardinal Point Apartments providing a hot lunch to the work crew. (Photo courtesy of Rice County Habitat for Humanity)

but they are quick to point out that Habitat works because of its many, and varied, volunteers – from its builders to board members and mentors to committee members and the new Master Gardeners, helping to make the homes even more beautiful.

Some volunteers even ride bicycles in the annual Habitat 500 (now entering its 26th year, the Habitat 500 is a bicycle ride - not race - and fundraiser that covers 500 miles over the course of 7 days, an average of 71 miles per day. Each rider raises funds from family, friends, businesses, and church groups and designates the Habitat for Humanity affiliates they choose).

Narhi and Menzel are especially grateful for the many volunteers who provide daily coffee, donuts, and lunches to the build crews – "oh, the cookies!" Even Habitat staff members started as volunteers. Narhi and Menzel both say they are inspired by Habitat's executive



**Larry Narhi
and Larry Menzel.**
(Photo by Misty Schwab
at Faribault Daily News)

are currently building homes 47 and 48, in Northfield and Faribault, respectively, and are on-track to build nearly a dozen homes in the next few years.

For Habitat volunteers, making a house a home is not about the hammers. It's about building a place where parents have increased financial security and less need for government assistance, where kids can learn to thrive academically and socially because they feel safe, where families participate more in their communities. Volunteers do it for love.

Julie Buchwald Haley is a freelance writer and PTSD survivor who works full-time, volunteers part-time, and is a pet parent to five. She recently returned to Minnesota after a 30+year absence to make new memories with her parents.

director Dayna Norvold for her hard work, dedication, and passion for Habitat and its mission.

Habitat for Humanity is an international nonprofit housing organization working in local communities across all 50 states in the U.S. and approximately 70 countries around the world. Habitat's vision is of a world where everyone has a decent place to live. It works toward this vision by building strength, stability, and self-reliance in families who need decent, affordable housing.

Habitat homeowners are required to volunteer 350 hours toward building their home and/or that of other Habitat homeowners, gaining important skills for maintaining their new homes and critical pride of ownership. Habitat homes are not free; homeowners pay an affordable mortgage.

Habitat also partners with Business Builders and Faith Builders, local organizations that commit for at least 12 months to provide volunteers and financial contributions to Habitat home builds. Local Faith Builders include Emmaus Church of Northfield, St John's Lutheran of Northfield, Northfield United Methodist, First English Lutheran of Faribault, and Our Saviors Lutheran in Faribault.

Business Builders include Uponor in Apple Valley (it supplies PEX floor heating), Square D Company (electric), International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 110 of St Paul (wire, boxes, and labor), DOW (foam insulation), Val-spar (paints and stains), and Whirlpool, which donates a stove/oven and refrigerator to every home built by a Habitat affiliate.

Rice County Habitat for Humanity volunteers



Volunteers from SageGlass of Faribault providing build help. (Photo courtesy of Rice County Habitat for Humanity)