



MATT SNIDER

Ben Lynford and Shane Lampert work to build a house on Crescent Drive in North Little Rock as part of Habitat for Humanity.

Habitat volunteers visit city

Homes are built on Crescent Drive and Valley View Drive

By Priscilla Pohnka
Special to the Times

While most teenagers are sitting in their air conditioned homes and watching TV, playing video games, or sitting at the computer, a group of youths from out of state are working in the hot sun, building houses for strangers.

The 16 teens are volunteers with the American Jewish Society for Service, and since May they have been helping Habitat for Humanity of Pulaski County build homes for low income families.

Local Habitat Director of Development Candyce Harris said the American

Jewish Society for Service asked Habitat about having Jewish students come for the first time to Arkansas and help build houses. They finish their work on Friday, having helped build houses on Valley View Drive and Crescent Drive in North Little Rock, and West 40th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Little Rock.

When the students get to the work site, the only thing there is is a concrete slab. The students help cut lumber, cut out openings for the windows, put the walls up, make sure the walls are secure, and also help put on the roof. The students worked Monday through Friday from

about 8 a.m. to noon, and on weekends went on local trips.

In addition to building houses, the students also helped out at the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in the Pike Plaza Shopping Center. Harris said the ReStore is where people can donate building supplies, and the revenue generated by their sale is donated to Habitat for Humanity. Harris said the students helped take down doors, windows and appliances from the Riviera, where they are building condos, to give to the ReStore. The

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students also helped out at the Rice Depot in Little Rock.

Harris said the teenagers are from all different parts of the nation, and never would have met each other before the program.

Morgan Foster, 16, from Long Island, N.Y., said she wanted to help people and found it interesting to build a house for a family in need. Marisa Lupo, 17, from Queens, N.Y., wanted to see a different part of the country. Ben Lynford, 17, from Brooklyn, N.Y., had past experience with building things, such as helping his school theater build sets, and also helped with his friend's dad's house.

"I wanted to help people, and I am good with my hands," Ben said.

Jacob Agus-Kleinman, 16, from Baltimore, Md., also thought it would be a good experience, but he also needed community service hours for school.

Each of the students will take home memories, as well. Ben said for the bulk of the summer, they built a house on 40th Street in Little Rock.

"Looking at it after putting on the roof and windows ... [and] just realizing the amount of work that went into it" was impressive, he said.

Jacob said when you finish a big project, the things that stick with you are how much work went into it and the difference you made.

"It's very rewarding," he said.

Marisa said being with this group of teens and having a good time are her best memories. She said she feels good about building houses, but it's nice to take a break and just have fun. Morgan agreed making new friends is a good memory. And Marisa said she liked going away on the weekends, including one trip to a cabin belonging to Tad Phillips, one of the Habitat workers; and they are going to Memphis before they leave for home.

The other teens participating in the program were William Finnie of Wilton, Conn., Justin Fisher of New Jersey, Ariela Fleisig of Yorba Linda, Calif., Jenna Gross of Dresher, Penn., Jacob Harris of Potomac, Md., Ilana Herr of Baltimore, Sasha Lamb of Washington, D.C., Shane Lampert of Newton, Mass., Chelsea Markowitz of Solon, Ohio, Yael Munishor of Denver, Colo., Sydney Shapiro of Sharon, Mass., and Emma Taffet of Short Hills, N.J. They were accompanied by counselors Dahlia Rockowitz of Scarsdale, N.Y., and Matthew Present of Rochester, N.Y., and project directors Matthew Goldberg and Lisa Rothstein-Goldberg of Baltimore.

The summer was not all fun and games; there were hard parts, too. Besides just learning how to build houses, the students also learned other valuable lessons.

"Sometimes situations are not the most ideal, but you have to get through them the best you can," Ben said.

Jacob learned that every lit-



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Marisa Lupo was one of 16 teenagers building houses in North Little Rock last week with Habitat for Humanity.

tle bit makes a difference and everything counts. And Morgan said she basically learned how to build a house, how to swing a hammer and use a measuring tape. Marisa said before she came to build houses, she thought it would be more difficult, but it was easier than she thought. She also said at the first work site there were 16 kids there, but that wasn't necessarily for the best.

"It was too many people to be productive, and there were not enough jobs for everyone to do," she said. "But then we were spilt up into smaller groups, and were able to learn more, and got more responsibility."

For Ben, the hard parts were the amount of work with little downtime and sleep, while Jacob said it was getting used to working out in the sun all day. Morgan agreed that working in the heat was hard, and she had to learn you can't get worked up over something not

going as planned, and getting used to going with the flow. Marisa agreed with them about sleep deprivation and the heat.

Marisa also said she liked being with the group, but it was hard to be around the same people constantly. Jacob agreed, observing it's impossible to get along with 15 other people all the time.

Ben said everything closes earlier, people show you "Southern hospitality" and there are a lot of bugs. Morgan said people are less rude, and Marisa said everything is more spread out, and there are more people in New York. They also said there are more churches in Arkansas.

Ben, Morgan, Jacob and Marisa all agreed Arkansas is quite different from where they are from. They all said people in Arkansas are nicer, and more relaxed.

"Arkansas has a small town atmosphere," Jacob said.