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MEDIA ALERT

Habitat for Humanity plans ‘Operation Home Delivery’ for hurricane victims

AMERICUS, Ga. (Sept. 3, 2005) – Habitat for Humanity International is launching “Operation Home Delivery,” a three-phase response to help provide assistance and rebuilding opportunities in New Orleans and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“First responders are providing immediate aid right now, but, soon, efforts will be moving toward helping people rebuild their lives and their homes,” said Jonathan Reckford, Habitat’s chief executive officer. “We are working now to make sure we have just such a plan in place when conditions are at a point that rebuilding can get under way.”

Specifically, the plan focuses, first, on helping Habitat affiliates that were hardest hit by Katrina restore some level of service. Then Habitat will seek to serve as a catalyst with other organizations, governments, corporations, foundations, etc., to bring people together to talk about low-income housing and recovery on a scale that Habitat alone would be unable to do, and third, to establish and implement a “home in a box project.”

Habitat’s plan is to assemble the materials needed to build a house – either purchased or donated – and then, working with affiliates, churches, corporations and others in communities all over the country, volunteers, working with building specialists, will “pre-build” the frame of a home over a few days. The house will be tacked together to ensure a rock-solid fit, then the frame will be taken apart and the components placed, along with other necessary construction materials, in a container and shipped to an area along the Gulf Coast or New Orleans where families, volunteers and builders will rebuild the home.

President Jimmy Carter, who has volunteered for more than 20 years with Habitat for Humanity all over the world, said, “In all my years as a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, I cannot think of a more important program than Habitat’s Operation Home Delivery.

“Hurricane Katrina may be second only to the Asian tsunami in the amount of devastation, destruction and human suffering, and just as with the tsunami, unprecedented destruction and suffering calls for an outpouring of generous response. Habitat for Humanity is in a unique position to provide long-term housing solutions for victims of this storm.

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“After their immediate needs of food, clothing and temporary shelter have been met, Habitat’s Operation Home Delivery will be working with churches, corporations, volunteers and other partners to get people back in homes and back on their feet.

“When pledging support for the victims of this terrible disaster, I hope people in the United States and around the world will consider both the immediate needs and long-term solutions offered by Habitat for Humanity and other organizations,” said Carter.

Habitat for Humanity will pilot the “Operation Home Delivery” project in September in Jackson, Miss., working with the local Habitat affiliate and others.

“ ‘Operation Home Delivery’ is a very bold initiative for Habitat, but it’s the kind of effort we believe is required to come back from Katrina’s three-state-wide swath of destruction,” said Reckford. “The first part, helping rebuild affiliates and restore services, is our responsibility, and we will do that with existing undesignated funds. But delivering those services, and scaling them up to meet the almost incomprehensible need is really what ‘Home Delivery’ is all about.”

For that, Habitat for Humanity International has issued an appeal for hurricane recovery and reconstruction donations. Using those donations, Habitat will build as many homes as it can fund.

“Just for understanding, \$100 million will build approximately 1,500 homes,” said Reckford. “With tens of thousands homeless, you begin to see that we cannot do it alone.” That is why Habitat is exploring collaboration with others: professional builders, mortgage lenders, bankers, foundations, manufacturers, governments, etc., to work together toward larger, more effective affordable and attainable housing solutions.

Additionally, Habitat leadership in Georgia and Washington, D.C., is working with members of Congress to ensure that affordable and attainable housing is a key component of any Katrina-related legislation. The global house-building ministry is also collecting information from and mobilizing its national volunteer and donor corps so that it can be ready to respond appropriately when conditions allow building to move forward.

“The most exciting part of ‘Operation Home Delivery,’ though,” said Nevil Eastwood, director of programs for Habitat, “is the ‘home in a box’ concept. This program holds the greatest potential for help and hope, and better, provides help and volunteer opportunities for people in communities all across America to have a role in rebuilding.”

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“You see why we call it ‘house in a box,’ ” said Eastwood, who added that this style of construction is fairly common for Habitat. “We use this method in blitz builds (faster than traditional house builds) around the world, so we know how to do it, and the homes meet or exceed every local code in construction practices.” In cases where Katrina may create new, more stringent codes, the houses will be built to meet any new event or situation.

There remain many logistics to be worked out – transportation, land, etc., said Reckford, “but we are confident that there will be many– building material vendors, transportation companies and others – who will be interested in helping to make this happen.”

It’s also a chance, he said, “to provide lasting change, and to provide volunteers who are waiting, anxiously, for something to do. This will let them take action – in their home communities – to help families and others in the storm-struck areas.”

The homes will mirror traditional Habitat homes, simple, decent places to live, providing approximately 1,100 to 1,300 square feet of living space. “These are not mansions by any means,” said Reckford, “but to the homeowners, they will be palaces.”

For more information about ‘Operation Home Delivery,’ people can visit Habitat’s Web site, www.habitat.org, where they can also sign up to receive more information or to volunteer – providing information about skills and experience – when conditions allow for volunteers to help rebuild. People can also donate to Habitat’s work in the Katrina-impacted areas on the Web site or by calling 1-800-422-4828.

Habitat for Humanity International, based in Americus, Ga., is an ecumenical Christian ministry that welcomes to its work all people dedicated to the cause of eliminating poverty housing. Since 1976, Habitat has built more than 200,000 houses in nearly 100 countries, providing simple, decent and affordable shelter for more than one million people. For more information, visit www.habitat.org.