

'IT JUST LIGHTS MY HEART UP'

Muffin Carothers reflects on 24 years guiding H4H families

Muffin Carothers and her husband, Peter, had just retired and moved to their dream farm home in Vermont in 1997, when she saw a flier at the bank about a meeting to organize a local Habitat for Humanity chapter.

“I said, ‘Habitat is a good deal.’ That’s what we decided we were going to spend our retirement doing,” she said.

And so they have. Over the next 24 years, the couple has served on the organization’s board, taken turns serving as president, pounded nails and sized up 2-by-4s, and ushered families into 12 new homes and counting. Today, Muffin continues to serve on the board’s Family Selection & Support Committee, guiding prospective families through the application process, then guiding them through homeownership. She is the only founding member who still has an official role with the organization (While Peter holds no official title, he organizes Habitat’s Home for a Home fall fundraiser.)

It took 18 months for the chapter to gain affiliation with the national organization after Middlebury College student Jennifer Jensen called that first meeting, Muffin recalled. There were stumbles



along the way. The fledgling group struggled to raise money. The first family chosen for the first home in Bristol didn’t work out. Board members even had to learn the hard way how to hold an efficient meeting.

“In the beginning, we would be

meeting in a church basement from 7 to 11 p.m., which was just awful,” Muffin said. “I’d never served on any kind of board. I didn’t know how to do any of this. We really sort of needed it to be as painful as it was.”

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Your support means so much

We will be sending out our annual fundraising appeal later this fall. If you’d like to beat us to the punch, you can help us save money on postage and paper by making

a donation now at <https://addisonhabitat.org/donate-2/>

Your gift will go right to work creating new homes for local families. Thanks!

MUFFIN

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Persistence and strong community spirit prevailed as Habitat for Humanity of Addison County gained traction. The group joined forces with the Hannaford Career Center's construction program to acquire a lot and build a home on North Pleasant Street in Middlebury, one in a series of cooperative efforts that have allowed Habitat to both give and receive help from local businesses and institutions. The organization's pace of building homes has gradually increased from an average of one every other year or so to one per year now.

Muffin has been involved in ushering families into all 12 of the homes Habitat has built, watching their children grow up and taking pride in their progress. She never tires of the feeling she gets from helping a family land their own home. "When it succeeds, as it so often does, it just lights my heart up. Just to see the difference a house makes," she said. "It makes me cry."

When people call Habitat for Humanity of Addison County's phone number (802-388-0400), it rings in the Carothers' kitchen. Sometimes callers are looking for immediate housing or want to donate a couch. She's collected a wealth of knowledge about resources available in the county and refers them to local shelters or other organizations.

She is also there on the other end of the phone when Habitat families need advice about homeownership.



"I always call Muffin," said Heather Gorton, who with her husband and children was Habitat's first homeowner in Bristol. "She's like the aunt. If you don't know who to call, she'll give you a suggestion. She'll guide you."

Twenty-four years after attending that first meeting, Muffin was right. This has turned out to be a pretty good way to spend retirement.

Muffin Carothers checks out progress on H4H's first Booth Woods home, including a unique two-level storage shed.

H4H's 'first family' celebrates paying off mortgage on their Bristol home

For 20 years, when they paid their mortgage each month, Heather and Ross Gorton and their children sent along notes to Habitat for Humanity of Addison County sharing updates on their lives and their appreciation for their Bristol home.

This summer, they have another update to share: They have paid off their mortgage. "It's very exciting!" Heather said.

The Gortons were Habitat for Humanity of Addison County's first homeowners when they moved into their four-bedroom home in December 1999. "They've been wonderful, and the house has been wonderful for them," said Muffin Carothers, a founding member of Habitat for Humanity of Addison County who has

watched the family grow over the years. The Gortons' six children, now ages 10 to 30, are all doing well, Heather reports. She now also has six grandchildren.

The house, too, has flourished over the years as the family updated the floors and kitchen, and added a deck, fruit trees, a garden and a maple sugaring operation. The family no longer raises pigs and turkeys as they did earlier, but 21 chickens reside on the property. "We are living off the land, like we always wanted to," she says.

Heather offers this advice to prospective Habitat families: "Don't give up. We never thought we would be homeowners, especially with such a nice house. Lean on the support. I felt like Habitat was part of our family."

Booth Woods home takes shape

As cooler weather set in, Habitat for Humanity of Addison County's first Vergennes home was just where it needed to be. The home's flat roof was sealed, the windows, doors, and exterior insulation were installed. The corrugated metal siding was about to be installed and crews were ready to shift their focus to the interior.

Work continued apace and on-budget throughout the summer and fall in spite of pandemic-driven supply and labor challenges, said John Ashley Cadwell, chair of Habitat's Building Committee.

The three-bedroom, 1,200-square-foot house—the first of four that Habitat for Humanity of Addison County will build in the Booth Woods neighborhood of Vergennes—will become the home of Kameron Gutierrez, Keisha Thompson and their three children.

Cadwell attributes the project's success to the fact that a hot market for construction materials has cooled, that vendor Goodro Lumber Co. of East Middlebury has come through with materials at a discounted price, and the work of Alex Carver, co-owner of Northern Timbers Construction and a Habitat for Humanity of Addison County board member.

"Alex is phenomenal," Cadwell

said. "We have an elite contractor who is dedicating about 20 hours a week at the same time he's running his construction company. He's on the ball in terms of ordering, sourcing material, and getting the best price. While he's out there, he's instructing, he's directing, he's counseling. It's amazing."

Carver leads a crew of about 10 Habitat volunteers on Wednesdays while Habitat veteran Harold Strassner supervises a similar crew on Thursdays.

The home's site—located in an undeveloped section of the Booth Woods neighborhood—has unique challenges that the crews have had to account for. Sewer, water, and electric all had to be extended, requiring the construction crews

to power their saws and drills by generator. Cadwell noted that the site is also rock ledge. "These houses are going to be stellar examples of what we can do on ledge," he said. "The house just perches right there."



Alex Carver, left, and volunteer Ken Remsen work on the first Booth Woods home in Vergennes.



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**Habitat for Humanity
of Addison County,
founded 1999**

Mail: P.O. Box 1217
Middlebury, VT 05753

Phone: 802.388.0400

E-mail:
habitat.addison@yahoo.com

Website:
www.addisonhabitat.org

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Habitat for Humanity of Addison County
Post Office Box 1217
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LOCAL ARTIST GOES TO BAT FOR HABITAT

Judy Albright is no stranger to Habitat for Humanity of Addison County. In fact, she's what we'd call a best friend!

Last February, she raised more than \$2,000 for the organization through her Art for Humanity painting give-away. Word has it that she's planning to do it once more, so keep your eye on www.judyalbrightfineart.com/art-for-humanity-project to try your chances at winning one of her amazing and home-warming pieces.

This August, she's done it again by offering for free her Kick Start Your Art and Introduction to Pastels



Detail from 'So You'd Better Get Ready,' pastel by Judy Albright.

classes to some very lucky students! In lieu of her normal fee of \$180 for a series of five classes, she asked her enrollees simply to make a donation of any size to Habitat for Humanity of Addison County. Judy and her students raised nearly \$1,500!

"I am told that that will buy a washer and dryer for the next Habitat home," Judy happily noted.

Many thanks to Judy and her students for their generosity. Our organization is 100 percent volunteer so 100 percent of all donations go toward building homes for our neighbors in the community.

Visit addisonhabitat.org to find out more.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE REBUILD

We've updated our website and hope you'll take a look. New features include a roster of the homes we've built and frequently asked questions.

www.addisonhabitat.org