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Foundation Lane thrills family

Four Habitat for Humanity homes near completion

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Plumber Austin Kearney installed a gas line at a Habitat for Humanity house under construction on Foundation Lane in El Cajon. (Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune)



Appliances in the Habitat for Humanity homes were donated by Whirlpool and Samsung. (Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune) -



NASCAR champ Jimmie Johnson's foundation raised \$880,000 for the Habitat for Humanity houses on Foundation Lane, and El Cajon's redevelopment agency contributed \$210,000.

EL CAJON — Kristine Tendvahl and her family are counting the days until they can move into their new Habitat for Humanity home in El Cajon.

Tendvahl, her husband, Don, their 6-year-old son, Joshua, and their 4-year-old daughter, Hannah, live in a rented home in Encanto where they don't feel safe. They've had problems with the plumbing, the insulation is poor and the wiring is "old and a little scary," Tendvahl said.

They're hoping to move to their new home on Foundation Lane, off Avocado Avenue in El Cajon, in early October.

"I want a home — not just a house — where my kids can grow up in a safe neighborhood," Kristine Tendvahl said. "It's just amazing that I'm going to own my own home in Southern California and it's not going to financially ruin me."

The Tendvahls' new home is one of four being built by volunteers with Habitat for Humanity. The Jimmie Johnson Foundation, started by the NASCAR champion who grew up in El Cajon, raised \$880,000 for the houses, and El Cajon's redevelopment agency contributed \$210,000.

The money helped pay for permits and public improvements such as installing streetlights in addition to defraying the cost of the homes, Habitat officials said.

"When we first started talking about helping out in El Cajon, I wanted to do something where you could actually see what we were doing in the community," Johnson said in an e-mail. "We originally committed to build one house, but it turned out to be four because of all the support we received."

The Tendvahls and two other families have been selected for three of the homes, and Habitat officials are reviewing applications for the fourth home. The foundation grant requires applicants who live or work in El Cajon.

Applicants are selected based on income and a willingness to put in work toward building their home. A family of four, for example, must have an annual income between \$49,560 and \$66,100. Their no-interest mortgage payment is no more than one-third of their income, generally about \$900 to \$1,000 a month, said Bradford Bates, executive director of San Diego Habitat for Humanity.

The first two 1,283-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath homes are scheduled for move-in Tuesday. The other two are set to be finished by Oct. 6, at a dedication ceremony that Johnson is planning to attend.

Bates said Habitat doesn't keep a waiting list of potential homeowners, but never has a problem finding people eligible for an affordable home.

"There are so many folks in need," he said.

Bates said Habitat for Humanity is currently working on building 23 homes in San Diego County, including houses in Oceanside, Carlsbad and San Diego's Oak Park neighborhood.

Paul Strangeland, construction superintendent for the El Cajon homes, said many of the items in and around the homes were donated by local businesses. Plumbing work on the homes was donated by Pacific Production Plumbing, and Norman's Nursery donated the plants around the homes. Appliances were donated by Whirlpool and Samsung.

Strangeland said volunteers range from youngsters working with their parents to people in their 80s; from those with extensive experience in construction to those with no background in building.

"They're all here because they want to be," Strangeland said. "It makes for a terrific atmosphere on the job site."

Mark Gabler, a 62-year-old retired high school biology teacher, is one of the volunteers who've been working on the El Cajon homes. He said he had been donating to Habitat for Humanity, but decided to get involved in building the houses after he retired five years ago.

“It's just the idea of doing something for someone, giving them a hand up,” he said.

As part of the deal for getting an affordable home, each adult in a family must put in 250 hours of “sweat equity” toward building their house.

Tendvahl, a 38-year-old substitute teacher, said her work has included painting and capping off a sewer line, while her 55-year-old husband, chief development officer for Set Free Ministries, has been doing construction cleanup.

“I'm going to take pride in my home because I had to help build it,” Kristine Tendvahl said.

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