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*Volunteers Diana Sanchez, left, and Afson Mohammadi install drywall on a ceiling in a Habitat for Humanity housing unit in Carlsbad on Tuesday. (Photo by Bill Wechter - staff photographer)*

**CARLSBAD: North County women build homes and hope**

By RENEE RAMSEY - For the North County Times

CARLSBAD ---- Some had never used a hammer, but 15 North County women spent Tuesday building new homes and hope for neighbors in need.

The 15 volunteers joined an all-female Women Build project in Carlsbad for San Diego Habitat for Humanity to help construct a two-bedroom condo for a North County waitress and her 4-year-old son.

"I'm the girl who's never held a hammer," said Linda Strand of San Marcos.

Strand, president and CEO of Independent Energy Solutions Inc. in Vista, had enlisted 14 friends and peers for the all-day project and contributed \$1,500.

Fellow volunteer Nancy Wood of San Marcos, head of an interior design firm called NK & Associates, knew all about construction tools from her past career as a pipe fitter and welder in Wyoming.

Wood was working alongside a new friend, Cynthia Bullock of Valley Center, president of North County Women in Networking and a director for cosmetics giant Mary Kay Inc.

"I've never been part of a build," Bullock said. "Now I can spray soapy water on a coupling to see if it's bubbling and leaking,"

Habitat for Humanity has held similar Women Build projects in cities across the country in recent years.

Volunteer Jann MacCollam of La Costa, director of donations for World Emergency Relief, nonprofit Christian service organization based in Carlsbad, said she was quick to say yes to

the all-woman initiative.

"Women are fabulous. When we put our heads together and our hands together, we can do great things," MacCollam said.

The Women Build volunteers joined a larger project under way since last fall to build 11 one- and two-bedroom Habitat for Humanity condos on land contributed through the City of Carlsbad with local, state and federal funding.

Joe Carton, a general supervisor for San Diego Habitat for Humanity, said the first six condos are scheduled for completion by mid-summer.

The second five-condo phase, for which funds still are being sought, is scheduled for completion in 2010, he said.

Carton, an 18-year Habitat for Humanity veteran, said overseeing women at one of the nonprofit's work sites was nothing new.

"Honestly, 40 to 50 percent of our volunteers are women," he said about home-building projects under way throughout San Diego County.

More than 100 Habitat homes have been built in the county since the San Diego chapter was formed in 1987.

For every project, after land is acquired, volunteers help construct homes or condos. In Carlsbad, church groups and military personnel have been among the volunteers.

Carton said that the future homeowners, who must meet strict income eligibility requirements, each contribute 250 hours to construction work. Carton said that a home then is purchased with a low-cost, 30-year interest-free mortgage.

"The best thing, it's not a giveaway. They'll be paying for their homes, and they've put in their own labor," he said about Habitat homeowners who otherwise do not earn enough income to purchase a home.

While the Women Build recipient was not at the work site Tuesday, Beverly Stavron of Vista was at work on her future condo.

"It's a dream come true," Stavron said, pausing as her eyes filled with tears. "There are so many good people."

"Everybody walks down a road, and it's nice to see people on either side trying to hold you up," she added.

Nearby, Shelley Reaves of Carlsbad, who works at a home improvement store in San Marcos, was working on another condo that will become a home for her and her 14-year-old daughter.

"I've never been able to own anything," Reaves said.

"It's like God sent me," she said about finding out about the Habitat program on the Internet.

For more information about San Diego Habitat for Humanity, visit [www.sdhfh.org](http://www.sdhfh.org).