Habitat for Humanity – Giving Back to Communities

Our third and last fieldtrip for our Construction Principles class was visiting one of Habitat for Humanity's construction sites. We were welcomed and toured by Alex Nesar, who is the Construction Site Supervisor/Manager for Habitat for Humanity's Broward affiliate. Woody, one of our classmates who is also part of Habitat for Humanity's Broward team, was also there answering questions throughout our visit.

Habitat for Humanity is an international non-profit organization that helps families get a home by paying interest-free affordable mortgages. Their Broward affiliate was established in 1983 and they have successfully built 429 homes throughout the county ever since their inception. Their latest project is located in Atlantic Blvd, east of I95, and will provide 77 homes to families in need. Habitat's work is achieved through the support of donors and volunteers. In fact, every Saturday groups of volunteers and future homeowners gather to work on different construction tasks and help build houses. Volunteers help in all aspects of construction, except for expert work such as electrical, mechanical, or plumbing.

The site we visited was located in the city of Fort Lauderdale and will provide for 3 single-family homes and two more across the street. Construction work started earlier this year in April and is scheduled for completion in December. The houses are currently in they "grey" stages of construction. The foundation and walls are complete on the 3 houses and roof work has started. It is worth mentioning, that a group of students, including myself, and alumni did volunteer work this past Saturday at the site. We were assigned to work on the roof trusses and I have to say it was exhausting to be under the sun working all morning, but at the end of the day it was an extremely satisfying and rewarding experience. There are no words to explain how it felt knowing that all our work and efforts will help a family get a home.

Alex mentioned their build-out schedule is between 6 to 8 months, but that they're trying to decrease it to 4 to 5 months. In order to achieve that goal, they will need more materials, subcontractors and volunteers on-site. Alex also mentioned that in order to meet their scheduling goals, if they do not have enough volunteers they will have to contract labor, which will increase cost. Therefore, one of the organization's challenges is getting enough volunteers to finish houses on a timely fashion and to avoid having to incur additional labor costs.

Likewise, materials and labor prices is a challenge in today's increasing and volatile market. Alex mentioned Habitat's Broward team is currently working on finding new subs to be able to keep costs in line. In addition, one of the biggest challenges Habitat for Humanity faces is the need of donations and families paying their mortgages to be able to fund operations.

Alex explained Habitat's work starts with their Land Director finding land or redevelopment sites, then they create a build-out schedule, and procure an architect to create preliminary drawings that will later go out for bidding. Their construction schedule is put together with the help of a software called "Primavera" in which each task has a predecessor and successor activity. Alex was kind enough to print out some samples from the software so we can compare

them to what we've learned in class so far. We were able to see Gantt charts and also how the software connects activities from start and all the way through the project's completion. This was a good opportunity to see concepts transform into practice.

During our visit, a member of the community stopped by to thank everyone for the great work Habitat for Humanity and its volunteers do. It was very moving to see someone appreciate, acknowledge and applaud the efforts done by all the members of the organization and its volunteers. Overall, I have to say visiting this site and having the opportunity to participate as a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity's Broward affiliate were the highlights of this semester. I have to thank Professor Thomas Wuerzer and Nova for this opportunity. It was not only a good educational experience but a very rewarding personal experience.