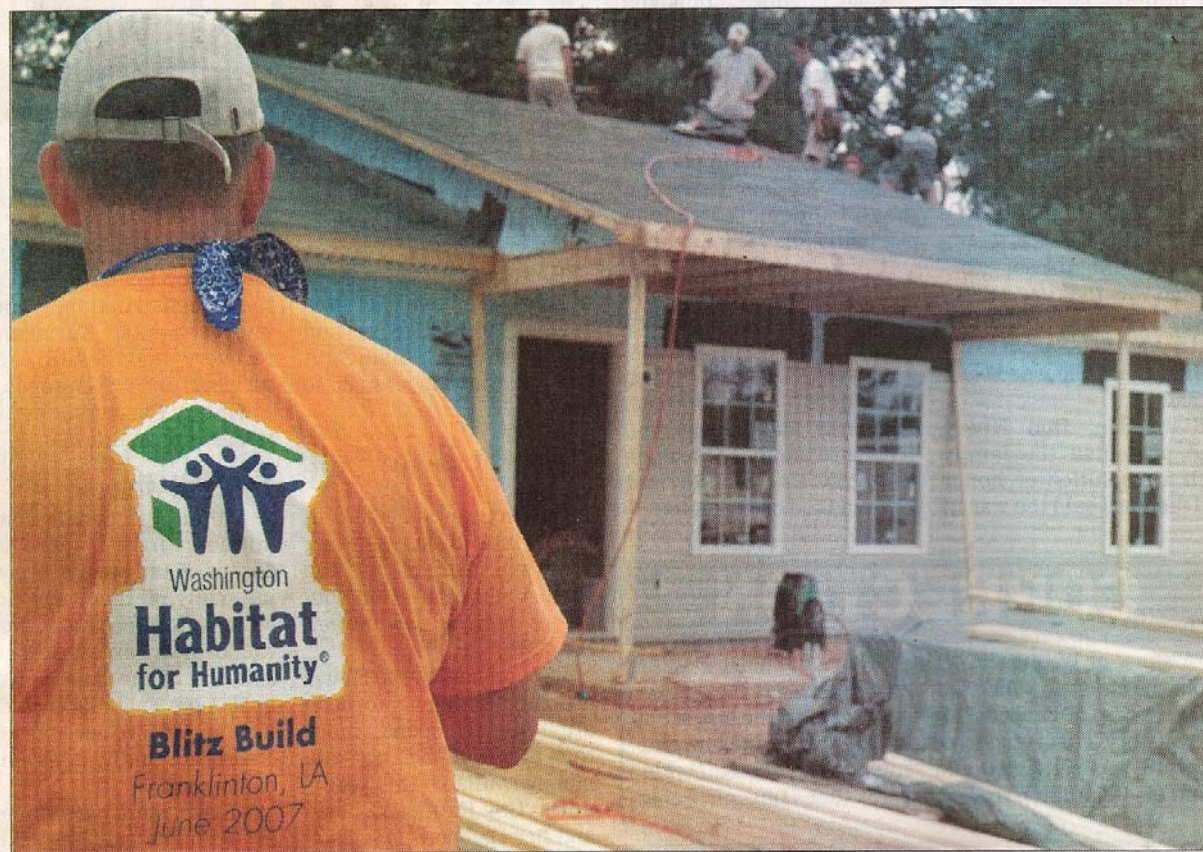


# The Sunday News

Vol. No. 80, No. 24

SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 2007 · BOGALUSA-FRANKLINTON, LOUISIANA

\$1.25



DAILY NEWS PHOTOS/Jacob Brooks

Ken Fink, a volunteer from Park Ridge, Ill., runs a cable from a new Habitat for Humanity house being built in Franklinton Thursday. Fink and other volunteers are trying to build the home in 10 days.

# Washington Habitat for Humanity gets 'Rock Solid' Chicago support

*Two houses in 10 days? 80 Illinois volunteers say 'coming right up'*

**BY JACOB BROOKS**  
The Daily News

FRANKLINTON – On Monday, there were two concrete slabs along Hilltop Drive. Three days later, however, the slabs were covered with a pair of houses, complete with frames, windows and walk-in bedrooms; although there is still plenty of work to do.

It's all part of a Washington Habitat for Humanity "blitz build," and 80 volunteers from Illinois are making sure

the homes are finished in 10 days time.

"This is Day Four," Jeff Engle said Thursday. Engle is the founder of Solid Rock Carpenters, a Chicago-based volunteer organization that has been to Louisiana eight times since Hurricane Katrina devastated the area in 2005.

"Over all of our trips, we figure we've helped about 70 families," Engle said, sporting a straw cowboy hat with a Solid Rock Carpenters button attached to the side of it.

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**Volunteer Jack Hedrich of Park Ridge, Ill., marks a line to cut siding.**

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This is the first time the group has made it to Washington Parish. They first came to Slidell in November 2005, and have been to various other locations in St. Tammany Parish since.

The current trip also marks the largest contingent of Illinois volunteers to come down with Solid Rock, Engle said. And it's the first time the group is doing the blitz build – building two houses in 10 straight days.

Much of the frame was actually done by about 400 volunteers back in Chicago. They built the frames of the homes, divided into wall sections, in two days and then trucked them down here.

Washington Habitat for Humanity laid the slab for the two houses and provides the volunteers with sleeping arrangements, tools and other building materials.

The new homeowners are Elecia Crain and Letosha Jenkins. The dedication is scheduled for Wednesday (Day 10).

The blitz build is providing a boost to new Habitat homes in the parish.

No houses were built last year, and only five had been done in the past 20 years, said Jeff Pruitt, director of

the Washington Habitat for Humanity.

Now, however, seven homes are in progress, including a home on Foil Road, scheduled to be dedicated June 25. Another 10 homes are expected to be complete by the June 2008.

"It's a blessing from God," said the Rev. Carlis Hart, the construction supervisor from Washington Habitat for Humanity, as he walks inside one of the new homes on Hilltop. He said he's never seen a volunteer group this big in the parish before. One of the homes is four-bedroom, two-bathroom; the other is three-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom.

For Engle, the reward is hearing the stories of both the people moving into the homes and the volunteers building them.

"Some of these (volunteers) have never done this before," he said. "Some are carpenters. It's really all about the people.

Engle said the group doesn't schedule another trip until they get back home and let the blisters heal. But another voyage to Louisiana is likely for Rock Solid Carpenters.

"We intend to be long term," Engle said.