

Families sought to fill Hope Village

Habitat project is competing with low prices for property

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Professional construction crews hustled this month to finish the first five homes in Habitat for Humanity's Hope Village in west Modesto.

Now Habitat is hustling to find buyers for the rest of Hope Village and for houses it's renovating throughout Stanislaus County.

"We're looking for 40 families," said Anita Hellam, Habitat's executive director.

She hopes Hope Village homes will be easier to market once families start moving in.

A dedication ceremony is

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A month ago these Habitat for Humanity homes were in the framing stage. Now the group seeks occupants for its Hope Village.

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HABITAT: Three floor plans and 2, 3 or 4 bedrooms

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planned for 3 p.m. Thursday at 820 Houser Lane.

Habitat always has taken pride in building homes with volunteer labor. To purchase a Habitat house, buyers must contribute 500 hours of labor, dubbed "sweat equity."

But buyers willing to hard for a home have been hard to find. Habitat's financial backers imposed a deadline for finishing the first set of Hope Village houses, so professionals had to be hired to complete construction.

As of Monday, four families had signed contracts to buy houses in the 20-home subdivision. Hellam said about six other families are lined up. Substantial work is required to finish the remaining 15 Hope Village homes and buyers are needed to supply the labor.

When the two acres for Hope Village were purchased in 2004, property prices were soaring and there was a dire need for affordable housing in Modesto. Many families applied for Habitat's help to become homeowners, but a significant number of them have quit the program.

"We've lost families to conventional purchases," said Hellam, noting how falling prices have enabled many families to buy homes without contributing sweat equity. "I think about half our families have dropped out because they lost their jobs."

Habitat requires its buyers to have a steady income.

Homes average \$132,000

Big incomes aren't needed, however, as the Hope Village construction costs have been subsidized by assorted government and private grants. Habitat also provides buyers zero-interest mortgages. Hellam said some mortgages will be as little as \$300 per month.

"You can clean houses for a living and still make enough to pay that," Hellam said.

At Hope Village, the average-priced home will cost about \$132,000, which Hellam said is \$25,000 less than Habitat originally had expected. She said contractors who finished the homes offered "ex-

cellent deals," and vandalism and theft was less than anticipated at the subdivision.

Three floor plans are being built: a two-bedroom 950-square-foot two-story house; a three-bedroom 1,150-square-foot single-story house; and a four-bedroom 1,300-square-foot two-story house.

The energy-efficient houses

include solar panels to generate electricity. They have private yards but are on very small lots.

Hope Village is at the east end of Houser Lane, near Paradise Road and Martin Luther King Drive.

Houses there have deed restrictions that require they remain affordable to low-income families for 20 years.

Among the first families to buy there will be George and Marta Hernandez, LeAnna and Elisha Holloway, James and Anna DeLao, and Pamela and Joe Baptista.

For more information about buying a Habitat home, call 575-4585, ext. 100.

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