

Home Builders Still Supporting Communities, Despite Downturn

During the holidays, many Americans pause to reflect on the year that is coming to an end. There was no relief in 2011 for the home building industry, which has been devastated by the economic downturn. Thousands of builders went out of business and many others continue to struggle to make ends meet on a daily basis. Yet home builders around the country are still putting aside their challenges to help less fortunate members of their communities.

“Home builders are making extraordinary sacrifices as they try to survive the ongoing economic downturn, and yet their generous spirit continues to shine in selfless acts of charity every day across the country,” said Bob Nielsen, chairman of the National Association of Home Builders and a home builder from Reno, Nev. “NAHB’s members are doing everything in their power to help others and preserve the American Dream of homeownership for those who are less fortunate.”

Despite Florida being extremely hard-hit by the downturn — it is among the states with the highest foreclosure rates in the country — home builder members of the Lee Building Industry Association in Fort Myers completed 33 charity projects in 2011. The projects included six major home renovations, four wheelchair ramps, six handicap accessibility bathroom renovations and other emergency construction services worth a total of more than \$600,000.

“Home builders’ businesses have been suffering for years, but as long as we are physically able to help others who can’t help themselves, we will be out there giving back to this community,” said Bob Bassett, board president of Lee BIA Builders Care.

Closer to home, members of the Home Builders Association of Greater Columbia have been helping their community as well. The HBA Charitable Foundation together with STOCK Building Supply is building a home for the Denny Family after Brian Denny suffered a spinal injury while on the job leaving him paralyzed. HBA Members have donated building materials, time and experience over the course of the year to build the family a new home. The family will move in to the fully-accessible home at the end of the year.

The Charitable Foundation also provides scholarship money to children of HBA Members each year and gives to various local charitable groups. These scholarships and donations are all made possible by donations from HBA Members throughout the year.

In addition, the Sales & Marketing Council of the HBA has made several donations to St. Lawrence Place throughout the year. St. Lawrence Place is a home for displaced families who are working to get back on their feet. Most of these families include children, which is why the latest donation, made just this week, was of Christmas gifts and winter clothing. Members of the Sales & Marketing Council are very happy to help these 20 families have a Merry Christmas.

Kelly Watson, owner of Bluestone Building in Birmingham, Ala., felt compelled to help a family whose home was destroyed by a tornado in April when he read in the local paper that the family was still trying to find a way to rebuild in August.

“When I read that the mother, who has multiple sclerosis, was going to have to be her own contractor, I thought it was another disaster just waiting to happen,” Watson said. He recruited volunteers and support from local and national organizations and provided the Burchfield family with a 1,600-square-foot three-bedroom accessible universal design home with a tornado-resistant safe room a few days before Thanksgiving.

When Dan Steurer and Kelly Stephens asked fellow members of the Southern Utah Home Builders Association to give what they could to help remodel and build a 2,200-square-foot expansion of the Doctors’ Volunteer Clinic in St. George, Utah, nearly 200 companies responded. The clinic, which was originally built by members of the SUHBA 10 years ago, provides medical care to low income and uninsured people in the community, and patients were being seen in storage closets and hallways due to overwhelming demand for services.

“For those in our industry to have given so much to build something that blesses so many at such a difficult time economically is an inspiration to us all,” said Steurer, a home builder and co-owner of Sunwest Development in St. George, Utah.

Home builders aren’t limiting their generosity to their own communities. Rutland, Mass., home builder Len Gengel has spent 22 weeks in Haiti this year building an orphanage that will house more than 60 children and staff to care for them.

Gengel and his wife founded “Be like Brit,” a 501(c)(3) charity (BeLikeBrit.org), after his daughter Britney and five others from Lynn University were killed during the January 2010 Haiti earthquake just one day after they arrived on a humanitarian mission. Due to the severely limited resources on the island, Gengel has to bring in even the simplest construction materials by ship or make them on site.

“On my last trip I checked eight hockey bags full of electrical supplies as luggage on the plane just so we could do the wiring,” said Gengel. “But two years after the earthquake there are still Haitians living in tents, so if we have to do it one cement block at a time, we will give these orphans an environment where they can grow, learn and thrive.”

Each year, the home building industry contributes millions of dollars in cash, building materials, supplies, and countless volunteer hours to community charities through local community service projects. To learn more about how NAHB members support their communities across the country, go to www.nahb.org/homebuilderscare.