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Posted: Tuesday, Jun 21, 2005 - 04:58:31 am HST

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Habitat Build-a-Thon is Saturday

By Lester Chang - THE GARDEN ISLAND

Posted: Tuesday, Jun 21, 2005 - 04:58:31 am HST

Kauaians Frank and Amber Rivera and Lorna Contrades have reached lifelong dreams, home ownership, thanks to officials of and volunteers with Kaua'i Habitat for Humanity.

Through a home-building project requiring them to volunteer time and skills, members of both families recently paid off mortgages and received deeds to their homes in Anahola, a Kaua'i Habitat official said.

Frank and Amber Rivera and their three children became members of the first family in the program to pay off their mortgage.

Both families recently reached those milestones as Alexander & Baldwin Foundation leaders awarded a \$15,000 grant to Kaua'i Habitat for Humanity leaders for a "Build-a-Thon" scheduled this Saturday, June 25.

The work will involve ongoing construction at four homes off Mehana Road in 'Ele'ele, and will mean more economically-challenged families on Kaua'i will be moving into completed homes one day soon, Habitat officials said.

Planning for such homes and the building of such homes is going on at a time when many local residents are being boxed out of a hot real-estate market.



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The Build-a-Thon is part of a community-building project of 125 lots in the 'Ele'ele Iluna subdivision. The land was donated to Habitat for Humanity's Kaua'i by an anonymous donor.

Participating families, who are supervised by professionals in the building business, must put in 700 hours of sweat equity toward the building of their homes, and the homes of others. In exchange, participants get no-interest mortgage loans, upon which they make payments.

The \$15,000 donation is a way to help low-income folks become proud property owners, said A&B Foundation President Allen Doane in making the grant presentation to Kauai Habitat Executive Director Annette Creamer.

"Increasing home ownership is a priority for communities across this state, and we are pleased to help support this grassroots and worthwhile effort to provide homes on Kaua'i," said Meredith J. Ching, chair of the A&B Foundation's Hawaii Committee.

"Our support for the Build-a-Thon is a text-book example of how the private sector and nonprofit organizations are working together to increase the supply of homes in their communities. We are pleased to fund this important day's work, and commend, in advance, the future homeowners and volunteers who will that day contribute 'sweat' of their own to these new homes," Ching said.

The Alexander & Baldwin Foundation is funded by the business activities of leaders and employees of Alexander & Baldwin, Inc. and its Kaua'i subsidiaries, including Kauai Coffee Company, Kauai Commercial Company, A&B Properties, Inc. and Matson Navigation Co.

Last year, leaders of the Alexander & Baldwin Foundation donated more than \$1.3 million to nonprofit organizations in Hawai'i.

A&B leaders' support of Kauai Habitat for Humanity's first phase of the 'Ele'ele Iluna subdivision during the Second Annual Build-a-Thon is greatly appreciated, Kauai Habitat officials said.

For their home, the Rivera family made monthly payments for 10 years, and the deed to the Rivera home was presented to Frank Rivera by Creamer recently.

Generally, it costs between \$60,000 and \$65,000 to build a home through the program, minus the cost of the land.

The projects sometimes are built on state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands parcels or on private lands, according to Catherine "Hokulani" Shining-star, a Kaua'i Habitat official.

Rivera said he thinks owning a home of his own might never have been possible without the help and support he received from Habitat and the money and labor donated by volunteers in helping them build their home.

The mortgage payments the Riveras made were used to help other deserving families become homeowners also, Habitat officials said.

When he was offered congratulations, Rivera said, "having a home of our own is a blessing."

Habitat homeowners Lorna Contrades and her son, Alan, became members of the second family in the program to pay off their mortgage.

Lorna Contrades, known as "La" to her friends, is a single mother with three children. She is the second homeowner to completely pay off her mortgage on her Kaua'i Habitat for Humanity home.

Contrades is hardworking and conscientious, and she is holding down a job while pursuing a college degree in liberal arts. She is focused on her goals, and takes pride in caring for her children and her home, Kauai Habitat officials said.

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She, too, received her deed, and congratulations from Creamer.

So far, 83 homes have been built on Kaua'i by Kaua'i Habitat, its participating family members and volunteers.

The work sites for the June 25 Build-a-Thon will be in 'Ele'ele, in Kaua'i Habitat for Humanity's new, 24-acre subdivision.

Four of the 18 homes planned for the first phase will be worked on during the Build-a-Thon.

Governor Linda Lingle has thrown her support behind the Kaua'i effort this Saturday that is part of a statewide push to build homes for individuals and families who need them.

"Everyone has a dream of owning their own home. Habitat for Humanity and I believe that those dreams should come true," said Lingle.

"Habitat has been building affordable homes statewide for over 15 years. You can lend a hand by participating in the annual Hawaii Habitat for Humanity Build-a-Thon on June 25. Help Habitat affiliates around the state build affordable homes, and raise money, too," she said.

"Check with the local Habitat affiliate on your island for more information," said Lingle.

Those interested in the volunteer work can call Habitat leaders or staff at their offices in the old A&B warehouse on Kaumuali'i Highway in Hanapepe, 335-0296, and ask Nicole, Catherine, Bob or Annette, for details on when and where to meet.

• *Lester Chang, staff writer, may be reached at 245-3681 (ext. 225) or lchang@pulitzer.net.*

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