

'A sense of community'



Photos by **JULIO CORTEZ** • julio.cortez@scripps.com

Patricia Jackson, with back to camera, gives a hug to Rebecca Cabrera as members of the Stuart Jet Center, right, hang out outside of the home they helped build for Cabrera through a Habitat for Humanity project in Indiantown. The home was dedicated to Cabrera minutes later Saturday. "It's great to have Rebecca as a neighbor," said Jackson, who also got her home in the neighborhood through Habitat for Humanity. "It's going to be a bunch of ladies around here and we'll look out for each other."

Five new homeowners dedicate their houses in Booker Park on Saturday

BY **JEREMY ASHTON**
jeremy.ashton@scripps.com

INDIANTOWN —

After building more than 50 homes, Habitat for Humanity of Martin County is trying its hand at building something more.

Habitat staff members, volunteers and sponsors helped five new homeowners dedicate their houses in Booker Park on Saturday — the largest single-day dedication in the organization's history.

"We've built a neighborhood, not just a house," said Doris Etelson, a member of Habitat's board of directors.

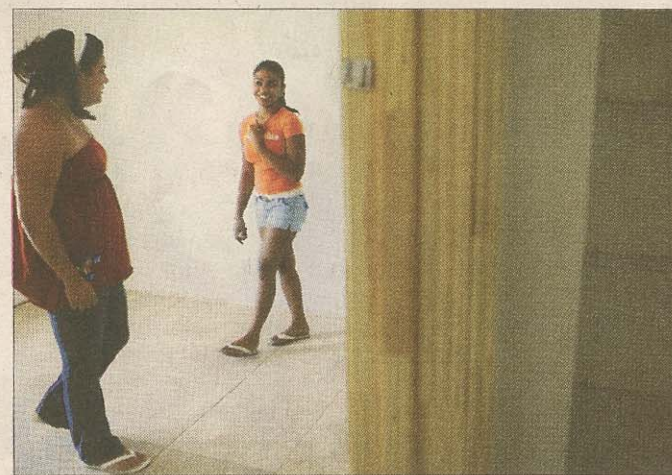
The homes won't be completely ready for occupancy for another

WANT TO HELP?

- The five new homes built by Habitat for Humanity of Martin County aren't quite finished yet. Volunteers still have to finish some of the roofs, lay sod and complete trim work inside the homes.
- Anyone interested in helping with the work over the next seven to 10 days can contact Habitat at (772) 545-9225.

couple weeks. Even as Pastor Wanda Hale of Bible Teachers International said a prayer for the

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Yolanda Rodriguez, 16, center, shows off one of the four bedrooms in her new house to Edna Pardo, 15, minutes after the new house was dedicated to Rodriguez and her mother, Rebecca Cabrera, as part of the Habitat for Humanity project in Indiantown on Saturday. Cabrera, a single mother of two adult daughters and two teenage daughters, is the first person in her family ever to own a home.

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homeowners, a volunteer worked on the roof of one of the homes.

Of course that didn't stop the new homeowners from proudly showing off their homes, the first any of them have ever owned.

They welcomed volunteers who worked for almost a year on the structures, serving a feast of fresh food in their new kitchens.

"To get a home brand new for practically nothing, it's a blessing," said 44-year-old No-

ra Gonzalez, who's moving into one of the houses with her two teenage sons.

But Gonzalez and the other homeowners aren't exactly getting something for nothing.

Each homeowner put in far more than the 200 hours of "sweat equity" required to get a Habitat home, which carries a 30-year, interest-free mortgage.

Gonzalez, who works at the Martin County Health Department, learned how to do practically everything related to the building of her home while visiting the site virtually every Saturday for months.

Aside from working on their homes, the five families constantly helped each other throughout the process, said Michele Reilly, Habitat's executive director.

"It's just an extraordinary thing," Reilly said. "They're already friends, and there's a sense of community before they move in."

The experience with the five Booker Park homes has convinced Reilly that building neighborhoods is Habitat's "wave of the future."

The organization will get plenty of chances to do just that in Booker Park. Habitat is preparing to put 12 more

homes on the block behind the five dedicated Saturday, and it has enough land nearby for 38 more pending county approval.

At the pace Habitat is going right now, at least those first 12 homes could be going in sooner rather than later. The organization has built 10 homes so far this year after finishing just seven all of last year, an improvement Reilly attributes largely to the increased involvement of corporate sponsors.

"Without our sponsors, we would not be able to move as quickly as we have this year," she said.