

Families in Fellsmere feeling at home in their brand new houses

By Lamaur Stancil

FELLSMERE — Pamela Jefferson was at a loss for words Nov. 10 when volunteers completed a brand-new home in one day for her and her family at no expense.

Days later, she still couldn't sleep. The excitement of the new homes for herself and next-door neighbor Martha Rainey, a cancer patient, kept the mother of three awake.

"Building one house in a day is a miracle," said Jefferson, who is unable to work because of a shoulder injury. "Building two houses in a day is a godsend."

Regatta Construction of Vero Beach organized the effort and recruited dozens of contractors to help. They started at 6:30 a.m. Nov. 9 and were ahead of schedule most of the day until the middle of the day, when it took longer for the drywall to dry than expected, said Joe Telese, Regatta vice president. But by the evening, both homes were done, save for the planting of sod on Rainey's property, which was completed Nov. 11, Telese said.

Last year, Regatta built a home in one day for a needy Wabasso woman. Organizers for the most recent construction said they're unaware of any other benevolent effort to build two homes in a day. It's a feat Telese said he won't try to repeat anytime soon.

"It was a little intense," he said. "And we know it was tough for the contractors to do this with the way the economy has been the last two years."

However, he's up to organizing an effort to build one house in a day next year. He said candidates for the home will be screened in a few months.

All materials and labor for the homes, valued at more than \$260,000, were donated. The work was done just two weeks before Thanksgiving, and Jefferson said she'll be ready to welcome her family into her new home.

"We've always had Thanksgiving here," Jefferson said. "In the past, everyone knew there were parts of the floor they couldn't walk on. They won't have to worry about that now."

The Jefferson and Rainey homes on State Street caught the attention of Julianne Price, coordinator for the Indian River County Health Department's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence program. Jefferson had a slew of hurricane-related repairs from 2004 that she could never catch up on with the money she earned with worker's compensation. Her youngest child, Veronica Jefferson, suffers from sickle-cell anemia, which brings its own set of bills.



Photo by Sarah Grile
Veronica Clark, 9, of Fellsmere vacuums the carpet in her new house earlier this month, about a week after her family moved in. A community service project helped organize the construction of two new homes in the area.



Hundreds of volunteers came together to build a home for the family of Pamela Jefferson, pictured, and one for Martha Rainey, a 63-year-old woman undergoing chemotherapy.

"We're just living day by day," Jefferson said.

But having a house in disrepair is no longer one of those day-to-day concerns.

"You've been crying a lot," Veronica, 9, told her mother recently at their new dinner table.

"You just don't know how happy your momma is," Pamela Jefferson told her.