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**Building homes during Spring Break 2006**

*Summary: Fifteen Habitat for Humanity students from the University of Minnesota, Morris travel to Taos, N. M., to help build homes for others.*

(May 23, 2006)-Fifteen students participated in the University of Minnesota, Morris' Habitat for Humanity service trip to Taos, N. M., during Spring Break 2006. The group squeezed into a 15-passenger van and left for New Mexico on Saturday, March 4, and returned a week later. Their goal? To help build homes for families in need.

While working in Taos, the participants stayed in the First Baptist Church in Questa, N. M., a neighboring town. After a few nights of sleeping on the floor, the students decided to go to Wal-Mart in Taos and pool money to get a few air mattresses and a pump. The drive to Taos from Questa was about 20 miles, but worth the commute.

The students worked on two separate houses that were fairly close to one another. Matt Harren, 2006-2007 UMM Habitat for Humanity president, shares: "The one was almost finished, while the other was just the foundation when we arrived. In the more finished one, we did a lot of sanding on the sheetrock seams and other assorted work. Most of our work, though, was on the other house. We leveled the dirt inside the foundation, dug a trench next to the wall to put in some insulation, and ran a compactor over the entire inside of the foundation to get it ready for cement to be poured. Then we set up a system using strings and surveying equipment to make sure the adobe would be level. A lot of the hours were laying the adobe bricks, mixing the mud, and the surrounding jobs."

The house that the group worked on the most was for a single-parent family—a mother with four sons, ages infant to seventeen. Shawn Olson, 2006-2007 UMM Habitat for Humanity vice president, was pleased that the eldest son joined the UMMers after school a few days during the week to help build.

Applying for Habitat housing is no easy task, according to Olson. He noted: "The family needed to apply, be reviewed, be accepted, was required to put in 300 hours of building others' houses, and pay a down-payment on the house, among other requirements. I had no idea of all the work involved for being accepted into the program!"

Olson notes that poverty is prevalent in the area. He informed: "In that area of New Mexico, the average yearly income is \$20,000 and the average house costs \$180,000. As a result, not many people have decent housing. It was nice to be constructive."

The students not only benefited from helping build a house, but they also enjoyed visiting a different part of the country, and making new friends. As Harren noted: "It's a good experience—seeing other parts of the country, meeting new people, and helping others who can't afford houses themselves." Olson agreed and added: "I made six or seven friends during the trip that I didn't know at all before, and we became very close."

Harren said that a Stevens County chapter of Habitat for Humanity is currently underway, and he looks forward to working with them in the near future. A Spring Break 2007 trip is still in the planning stages, but Olson mentioned that

there is a possibility that UMM Habitat may visit New Orleans and/or other hurricane affected areas. On behalf of future trips, Harren noted: “We’re always looking for more people!”

Olson shared: “The trip out there was fun and rewarding. Meeting the family and seeing the impact directly was a great experience. Our group was close-knit, and I learned a lot about the different styles of building. All in all, it was a great trip!”

Participants on the UMM Habitat for Humanity Spring Break trip to Taos, N. M., included: Sam Wahl '08, Watertown, S. D., Crystal Oko '07, Woodbury, Nicole Abel '07, Sauk Rapids, Meredith Lorig '08, Minneapolis, Meredith Vukelic '07, Bismarck, N. D., Shawn Olson '08, Thief River Falls, Jacob Nelson '06, Litchfield, Corey Kelzenberg '08, Fridley, Matt Harren '08, Eagle Bend, Andy Jensen '08, New Prague, Tara Connolly '08, Danvers, Nate Wood '08, Eagle Bend, Heather Huberty '06, Blaine, Brian Holte '08, Aitkin, and Stephanie Tomte '06, Verndale.

For more Habitat for Humanity photos, click [here](#).

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