

## Hartford Courant

# Habitat Group Begins Building 16 Homes In City

By Jenna Carlesso

September 22, 2011

HARTFORD — — Margarita Hardy has always dreamed of owning her own home.

The Collins Street resident currently shares a one-bedroom apartment with her 16-year-old daughter, and space is tight.

"If I had my own house, she'd have her own room," Hardy said.

Things will soon change for the family. Hardy and her daughter were selected to live in a new house on South Marshall Street — which Hardy will own.

Hartford Area Habitat for Humanity has begun work on 16 single-family units near the intersection of South Marshall and Hawthorne streets. The project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2012, said Brooke Penders, director of development for the organization.

Eight families have so far been chosen for the units, and the organization is accepting applications for the remaining eight. Each 1,200-square-foot unit will have three bedrooms and a garage.

The roughly \$4 million project will be funded by a combination of corporate donations, city money, grants and volunteers. The city has contributed \$1.5 million to the project, Penders said.

"South Marshall Street is one of the most challenged streets in the city," she said. "Aetna is very concerned about that area. They want to make sure their community is vibrant."

Aetna is one of several corporations donating money and volunteers for the project. Area businesses like Travelers and The Hartford have also gotten involved, organizers said.

More than 5,000 volunteers from civic groups, faith organizations, businesses and educational institutions will help build the homes. Construction began on Sept. 6.

The South Marshall Street area was also chosen because it is part of the Asylum Hill neighborhood, which has the lowest rate of homeownership in the city, Penders said.

"The safety of a neighborhood improves when you have homeownership," she said, "and when you have a good home that was well built, without a lot of issues, families thrive."

To qualify for the South Marshall Street housing, families must have an annual household income of no less than \$34,000 and no more than \$50,000. Each adult must contribute 150 hours of "sweat equity" to help build the home and more than 50 hours of classes in the areas of financial literacy, home repairs, landscaping and move-in preparations.

Penders said families selected to live in the housing units, which are similar to townhomes, have already begun to work on the homes