

Hartford Courant

House Of Hope: Program Helping Families

By Tom Yantz

June 6, 2011

HARTFORD -- Regina White paused to count the number of apartments she had lived in **New Britain** and Hartford from ages 13 to 22.

"Let's see, probably 10 or 12," she said.

She prefers, though, not to reflect on those numbers, but rather on a single one.

"This is my house, and I've been here for going on 13 years now," she said from her three-bedroom ranch. "This is stability, security a new start, a new life."

White and her daughter Daija, 8, live in a home constructed by Hartford Area Habitat For Humanity. Volunteers and donations helped build the house in 1998.

"It came with refrigerator, stove, dishwasher, washer and dryer, for less than \$100,000 and no interest," White said. "If I paid just 5 percent interest on a \$100,000 mortgage -- oh you can't imagine what the savings means to me and the generosity of others to do this means."

Said McKinley Albert, Hartford Area Habitat For Humanity's development officer-private grants: "We also provide 50 hours of education on wills, mortgage insurance and other things. These are important tools for a new homeowner."

She said 185 affordable homes have been constructed in the greater Hartford area -- over 150 are in Hartford -- since Hartford Area Habitat For Humanity received its affiliate charter in 1989. It currently has about 5,000 volunteers.

In 1997 when White told her friends that she had been accepted for the Habitat program, she received some negative comments.

"They said, 'Why are doing that? It's volunteers. You'll have problems. The house won't last,' " White said. "The truth is the house is great. I've had no problems; never called an electrician, plumber or anyone."

White, a single mother, sat recently in her spacious living room with family photos on the wall. The words, "God Bless This Home" are on another wall.

White, 34, works as an operations specialist at Wood Group in **East Windsor**. It's a repair facility for military nozzles and shutoff equipment.

She knows the meaning of "sweat equity."

"Part of the process of having a home through Habitat is doing sweat equity," White said. "Back in '97 it was 400 hours. So in that year through '98 I volunteered and worked."

She installed sheet rock, shingled, painted and did landscaping. "I like sheet rock the best," she said. "I like the nice finished look."

She's still a volunteer for Hartford Area Habitat For Humanity. "I partner with prospective home owners and walk them through the entire process," she said. "The energy you see when their house is going up, you can't describe."

In addition, she has earned an associate degree in accounting from **Post University** and a bachelor's degree in business management from Albertus Magnus.

"How do I tell my daughter to aspire to go to college if I didn't do that?" White said. "That and this home are all about leaving a legacy. I don't want to leave just an inheritance. I want to show and lead by example of what is out there and what you can do."

Visit www.hartfordhabitat.org/ to donate to Hartford Area Habitat For Humanity.