

Volunteers come from across country to help with Pownal Habitat for Humanity project

Volunteers come out from across the country

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Workers for the Habitat for humanity construct a... (Holly Pelczynski — Bennington Banner)

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POWNAL >> Twelve volunteers from Global Village came to Swallow Hill Road from across the country this week to help with a Habitat for Humanity build.

Global Village is an organization within Habitat for Humanity that connects volunteers with Habitat projects around the world. Volunteers pay a fee that goes toward the local HFH, as well as food, travel, and leisure activities during their stay.

"It's a tremendous commitment that they make," said Dick Malley, of the local HFH chapter "They came on Sunday and they stay through next Sunday. So, we try to roll out the green carpet, and make sure they have a great experience." He added that even the homeowner, who works a full-time job, came out on Monday to join the Global Village and local volunteers working on the house, to show his appreciation.

The Bennington Area HFH has worked with Global Village many times in the past, and a build in Manchester is currently on the organization's schedule for August. Each Global Village volunteer for that project will spend a week in Manchester, and will pay \$1,590 for the opportunity to help with the build.

Leading the trip from the GV side were Maria Winston and Kristin Distelhorst, who have 13 builds between them. While most of the volunteers have never met before, Winston and Distelhorst have been leading trips together since they met on a Global Village build in Poland. They said they had been told that the Bennington Habitat affiliate was a very good one to work with, and that played strongly in their desire to help out with this project. Distelhorst noted that the volunteers not only pay for the right to, effectively, work for free for a week, they also often have to use vacation time, so choosing to volunteer for a local chapter that is known for taking care of its volunteer is important.

"The affiliate has been wonderful to work with, and it doesn't always happen that way," said Winston, who added that she became convinced to volunteer her time for the Bennington affiliate when Malley sent her information about the family the home is being built for, who she described as "absolutely amazing."

Diana and Walt Jarrett represented two of the most experienced Global Village volunteers, having teamed up for 11 builds. "We were very blessed, and we had taken many vacations," explained Diana, "and it became time to plan the next vacation. That led us to the idea of trying to find a vacation with a purpose. Just searching the internet and talking to people, Habitat really seemed to fit the bill. My husband said at the time, 'This seems right. People need a house, you build them a house.' From the first build on, it just grabs you; you see the difference being made by Habitat. And every year, we keep doing it again." Among the places they have traveled to through Global Village are Alaska (twice), Romania, Portugal, Macedonia, New Mexico, South Dakota, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Trinidad.

The Jarretts agreed that traveling with GV has given them a better sense of the communities they volunteer in, compared to just spending some time there on vacation. "You say with travel, you're never really seeing the country, the people. With Habitat it's the exact opposite."

For one volunteer, Katie Patterson, the Pownal build represented her first time volunteering with Global Village. "I've always volunteered on a small scale, locally," she said, "so I wanted to do something that was bigger, and be part of a bigger community, and do something that really impacted a family. I love meeting people and I love helping people, so this seemed like a great fit." Patterson said that she hopes to someday participate in the global aspect of the program, but for now the New Jersey native is content with staying a little closer to home.

"So far, it's been amazing," she said, "These are incredible people, and the family we're building the house for is so deserving, fantastic, and helpful."