

VHS Seniors, Habitat Joining Forces Again

By Laura Sikes, Daily Sun Staff Writer
Aug 17, 2019



George Horsford, Daily Sun

Danielle Stroud, right, senior director of development for Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter, gives a high-five to Michael Goodridge, a 12th-grade member of The Villages High School's Construction Management Academy who will help build a Habitat for Humanity home on Orange Circle in Lady Lake.

Dressed in her work boots, Villages High School senior Ashley Hess looked over the patch of grass Friday where, soon, she and her classmates will build a family's home. "This experience will help me build something from the ground up," she said. The Villages High School seniors, who are students in the school's Construction Management Academy, joined about 40 others for a groundbreaking ceremony hosted by Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter on Friday for a new home on Orange Circle near Lemon Street in Lady Lake. Habitat and the academy are working together on the project to provide a new home for Brandee Shields of Ocklawaha. Shields attended the ceremony before she headed to work for The Villages Health. The mother of two boys, ages 8 and 9, is looking forward to her new home.

"I'm excited, overwhelmed and so thankful to be a part of the whole process," she said.

Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter, with the help of volunteers and sponsors, builds affordable homes. The homes are sold to those who demonstrate a need and are willing to partner with the organization by performing activities such as participating in the building of their home. The home on Orange Circle marks the second that seniors in the school's academy will work on, said Bruce Haberle, the instructor for the academy.

Last year, Haberle led about 11 seniors on the project. They worked from August until May to complete their first home. The program was such a success that Habitat and the academy decided to work together again, Haberle said.

This year, he will have five seniors working on-site during two morning class periods, and hopes to have seven more seniors in his afternoon class work on the home.

The project exposes students to the construction trades and helps Habitat with its mission to build homes, said Danielle Stroud, senior director of development of Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter. Students will work side by side with Habitat's construction staff and professional tradesmen on the home.

"I'm most looking forward to working with this second group of students and seeing them being able to enter the workforce," Stroud said.

It's a win-win, she said.

On Friday, Stroud welcomed the students, as well as Shields and other guests, such as Brad Weber, executive vice president and chief lending officer with Citizens First Bank.

It's the second year Citizens First Bank has been a lead sponsor in the Habitat project with the school.

"What really excites our team is getting to help put a family into a home and seeing The Villages High School students get the experience," Weber told the guests.

Other guests included a representative from Congressman Daniel Webster's office and Lady Lake Mayor Jim Richards, who was there to do the ribbon cutting.

"[The program] is a great marriage between the school and Habitat because some of the best engineers I hired came from [this kind of] co-op programs," Richards said.

But before work could get underway, the students still needed something. Dr. Kelly Colley, vice principal of The Villages High School, welcomed the eight students up front to receive their certificates for completing the OSHA 10-hour training course. They completed the training during their junior year and need it to work on the site.

The OSHA training was provided by employees of RoMac Building Supply. Don Magruder, CEO of the company, is chair of the academy's advisory board. Magruder serves as a liaison between the school and the private sector. Not only did his staff provide the OSHA training, they also helped instruct students how to install windows and doors and served as mentors during their class time.

"We need to develop the craftsmen and the construction leaders of the future," Magruder said.

After the certificate presentations, each student made a brief comment about why they are in the program, and thanked the sponsors and Habitat.

Ashley drew applause when she mentioned that she was the first girl to join the academy, and added that now two more girls had joined the junior class this year.

"I chose this because I've worked around construction my whole life," she said.

Her fellow student, Cole Chancey, told guests he was looking forward to the hands-on work experience and helping give back.

"I can't wait to help the family out and to learn more along the way," he said.

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