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App builds a home project initiates with Habitat for Humanity
by Harley Nefe

Watauga County Habitat for Humanity is partnering with the Appalachian State University community to build a Habitat house for a family in need. This working project is called App Builds a Home.

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit housing ministry that “partners with communities all over the world to help build and improve affordable homes,” the App Builds a Home planning committee said in a presentation during a kick-off celebration Nov. 1. “Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage. With this support, Habitat homeowners achieve the strength, stability and independence they need to build a better life for themselves and their families.”

There are three criteria every Habitat family must meet to qualify for a Habitat house, according to Watauga County Habitat for Humanity’s website. Applicants must be in need of a house due to overcrowded or substandard conditions, unreasonable housing costs in relation to gross income, physical need requirements or the inability to receive a conventional loan. They also must have the ability to make monthly mortgage payments with an annual income between 30 and 60 percent of Watauga County’s median income. As of 2017, Watauga County’s median household income is at \$41,541, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Lastly, applicants must have the willingness to partner with Habitat for Humanity and work between 250 and 500 hours.

Watauga County Habitat for Humanity’s vision is “a world where everyone has a decent place to live,” according to their website. They currently build one house per year due to high budgeting costs.

“As members of the Boone community, we have a civic responsibility to give back to the place that so openly welcomes us into their home,” the App Builds a Home planning committee said.

The App Builds a Home project can allow for there to be an additional house built each year.

“Affordable housing is a major problem in Watauga County, and we want to fix that one house at a time,” the App Builds a Home planning committee said.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 62.2 percent of residents live below the poverty level in Boone.

“The App State project is a really cool opportunity for the school and the community, because it is bringing Habitat to the forefront of App State’s focus,” sophomore Kayla McDougle said. McDougle is the president of App State’s Habitat for Humanity club and is a part of the App Builds a Home planning committee. “It’s also opening up the school’s mind to what’s going on outside our little bubble. I feel like a lot of students are unaware of the state of Watauga County; It definitely needs a lot of help.”

The App Builds a Home planning committee said that “this home build is a tangible commitment to our community and an opportunity for a campus-wide project to bring together students, faculty and staff to build a home for a local family.”

The difference between a regular home build and the App Builds a Home project is that the project is going to be assisted by App State through various clubs and organizations coming together.

“App State is going to be fundraising for at least half of the cost of the home and will be providing all of the volunteers for the project,” McDougle said. “Watauga County will still be

supervising the project to make sure we are doing everything correctly, but App State is going to be more heavily supporting it.”

Experience is not necessary to be able to volunteer with the project. Habitat for Humanity has construction managers overseeing the project, who are familiar with the tasks needed. They show volunteers how to use tools and help build throughout the entire process.

“We don’t have to have that heavy experience to be able to give back,” McDougale said. “Most days you’re working alongside the families with who you’re building the home for, so you get a really cool relationship with them, too.”

The App Builds a Home planning committee is hoping to start building in the summer of 2019 and have the construction pick up in the fall semester when the majority of students return back to school. The build is projected to last until spring 2020.

“I am personally an action type of person, so I attended the interest meeting and got really excited about the project,” senior Megan Laws said.

The current step is to spread the word and begin fundraising for the project.

“We have gotten a lot of positive feedback from everyone we talked to so far about this,” McDougale said. “It’s been exciting to see the reaction that we have gotten from everyone we talked to. I definitely think this should be really fun, and I think it will be really cool to see all the clubs and organizations come together.”

The App Builds a Home planning committee hosted a fundraising workshop Nov. 29 at the Plemmons Student Union where groups could brainstorm events that would help raise money.

“We definitely have an impact on the community,” McDougale said. “This project is a great way for us to give back and say, ‘Thanks for welcoming us, and we are here to help you

guys.’ This is the perfect thing to be involved with because not only do you get hands on experience, but you’re helping your community too.”