

## New Habitat housing project to start

By TRAVIS KAYA, Staff Writer

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WAILUKU – A work crew of 200 volunteers including Lt. Gov. James “Duke” Aiona will convene on the Waiehu Kou IV subdivision today, working alongside 12 Maui Native Hawaiian families to begin construction in Habitat for Humanity’s fourth annual Build-A-Thon.

Bringing community organizations, church groups and businesses together for the annual event, Habitat for Humanity hopes to help make the dream of homeownership come true for the homestead families dealing with inadequate housing or homelessness.

“They’re always so happy to realize their dreams,” said Sherri Dodson, executive director with Habitat for Humanity Maui. “You get to see immediately the gratitude in the families’ faces.”

Volunteers will be organized into 12 teams to lay the foundations for the houses that will take eight months to a year to complete. Through the day, the work crews will set foundations and frame the 12 houses in a program to raise awareness of the need for affordable housing. Participating groups will also make donations to Habitat to continue construction of the houses on weekends until each is completed.

“It’s like a walk-a-thon, but with building homes,” Dodson said.

Habitat for Humanity is an international organization founded in 1976 to address issues of poverty and housing. Habitat volunteers have built more than 200,000 houses, helping an estimated 1 million people worldwide get into housing.

Habitat clients generally are working families whose incomes run between 25 to 65 percent of the median household income for their regions. In order to be accepted into the program they must be able to put in 500 hours of labor, or “sweat equity,” into construction.

In addition to help with building a house, Habitat clients are provided debt-management classes for homeowners. Once the homes are completed, the recipient families will be required to pay Habitat for Humanity an \$80,000, no-interest mortgage to cover the cost of materials.

“I think it’s a wonderful program and it’s helping people like us fulfill our dreams, said Marlene Peralta, one of 12 future homeowners chosen to work alongside volunteers during the Build-A-Thon. “I wanted a house for years, but I never got there because of my finances.”

For the Waiehu Kou IV project, teams of workers from Dowling Co., Home Depot, Maui Electric, Marriott Resorts and a host of other businesses and community organizations have registered for the volunteer efforts. Many of the teams have participated in other Habitat projects on Maui, at Waiehu Kou and at the Waiohuli Hawaiian Homes project in Kula.

“It’s just something that we love to do,” said four-time Build-A-Thon participant John Jaskula, general manager at the Wailea Marriott Resort. “For people who never dreamed of owning their own home, we make it possible through volunteering.”

The Build-A-Thon will jump-start construction on the houses that additional volunteers and the Habitat clients will complete over a period of months.

“We are grateful for all the teams who signed up for our Build-A-Thon, but the real challenge is getting the community to come out after the Build-A-Thon to help finish the homes,” Dodson said.

Habitat volunteers have building events every Saturday and at different times during the week. Crews do not need to have experience in construction, and everyone is encouraged to help out at any time, Dodson said.

For information or to volunteer, call 893-0334 or visit [www.habitat-maui.org](http://www.habitat-maui.org).

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