

HABITAT FOR BIRDS AND PEOPLE



Mackenzie Kagle, left, puts together a birdhouse with the help of fellow volunteer Jessica Titterton yesterday. New York Life employees were building birdhouses and garden benches at the company's Parsippany office for Habitat for Humanity homes in Denville.

PHOTOS BY ARISTIDE ECONOMOPOULOS/THE STAR-LEDGER

Crafting warm touches for new homes

BY AL FRANK
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With bottles of glue and gobs of acrylic paint, the conference room in a Parsippany office building had all the looks of a kindergarten on an arts and crafts rampage.

But this was New York Life Investment Management and the 40 employees — and some of their children — were laboring after hours yesterday for a good cause.

Having already built two Habitat for Humanity homes on Husa Place in Denville, the employees now were preparing a couple of housewarming gifts: outdoor benches and birdhouses and feeders to hang in the backyard.

The teams of about 10 donated a Saturday every six weeks for 18 months to help build the homes. But the housewarming parties a few weeks back left them hankering to put in a few more hours on top of the 1,000 they had already spent on building foundations, putting up drywall and landscaping.

"Both (homes) have nice wooden porches and so we can

just see these benches with the parents sitting there watching their children," said Jim Kucharski, of Green Township, vice president of information technology, who has coordinated New York Life's participation with Habitat for the past three years.

Enter Susie Schub and her Morristown company, Jumpstart, which links corporate volunteer programs with needy entities.

Schub contacted artist Karen Titterton of Whippany. Her dad cut the pine for the birdhouses and feeders, and the kits for the cedar benches and planters were purchased from a garden supply company.

Each is to be embellished in keeping with the families' decorative preferences. The children of one liked animals and plants, while the other favored the extraterrestrial.

So Titterton assembled cut-outs of butterflies, dogs, flowers and horses to paint and suns and moons and stars to tile. The items

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A decorative tile moon is worked on by volunteer Carmalee Foster.

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