

Habitat for Humanity buys second Marin home, this one in San Rafael

By Jennifer Upshaw Swartz

Posted: 01/25/2010 05:52:27 PM PST

Habitat for Humanity has acquired its second foreclosed Marin County property and will begin hosting meetings in search of a family to take ownership.

A three-bedroom, two-bath home at 21 Stevens Place in San Rafael will be the nonprofit's next venture after last fall acquiring a five-bedroom, two-bathroom duplex, currently being rehabilitated into a three-bedroom, two-bath property at 1674 Center Road in Novato. The home in Novato is expected to be completed this spring. A family is expected to be selected this week.

"Obviously there's a huge need for affordable housing in Marin," said Jennifer Doettling, Habitat spokeswoman. "We've been very eager to provide a solution. This provides us with a way to get started in Marin."

Plans for the San Rafael home call for demolition of an illegal unit, a kitchen and bathroom remodel, fresh paint and new floors. The new owners, who will buy the roughly \$297,000 home at no profit to Habitat and receive a zero-interest loan, are required to put about 500 hours of "sweat equity" into the remodel. Eligible homeowners who work or live in Marin are first-time homebuyers; legal permanent residents or U.S. citizens; households who have lived together for one year with an annual gross income from \$38,720 to \$58,080 for a family of four.

In San Rafael, the family selection process, which begins next month, requires prospective owners to attend an orientation meeting, where they will receive an application and learn about the program.

Orientation meetings are set for 6-8 p.m. Feb. 23 and 10 a.m. to noon Feb. 27 in the Kennedy Room at Saint Raphael Church, 1104 Fifth Ave. in San Rafael. For more information and a list of program requirements, go to www.habitatgsf.org. For questions about the orientation, the home and the selection committee, call 625-1010.ÊÊ

Habitat, well known for its celebrity advocates such as Brad Pitt and former President Jimmy Carter and its work to bring housing to impoverished areas, has remodeled about 450 homes in the Bay Area, with help from volunteers and the prospective owners. The organization, with offices in San Francisco and administrative headquarters in Atlanta, has long eyed Marin as rich terrain due to its high housing prices and shortage of affordable housing for low-income workers.

In the 1990s the group closed its Marin branch due to lack of support. In late 2006, plans to bring four homes to Strawberry in partnership with a private market-rate developer were explored, but were placed on hold in part due to neighborhood opposition and the faltering economy, although officials said they still hope to bring the housing near the intersection of North Knoll Road, Bay Vista Drive and Eagle Rock Road to fruition one day.

In May 2007, the Marin Community Foundation announced that boosting affordable housing in Marin would be one of four strategic initiatives it would spend more than \$60 million on over the next five years. The foundation has contributed \$250,000 for Habitat's work in Marin.

"In a sense also it allows people to earn their way to that home, both by what contributions they are making vocationally in the community as well as putting the sweat equity and the pride of ownership into a neighborhood home," said Thomas Peters, foundation president.

"We are enormously proud of the relationship with Habitat," he said. "It's been years and years. Many, many community activists, not just the foundation, have wanted to have Habitat in Marin and now we do. We're delighted."

Orientation meetings to apply to purchase a home at 21 Stevens Place in San Rafael from Habitat for Humanity are set for 6-8 p.m. Feb. 23 and 10 a.m. to noon Feb. 27.

Both meetings will be held in the Kennedy Room at Saint Raphael Church, 1104 Fifth Ave. in San Rafael. For more information and a list of program requirements, go to www.habitatgsf.org. For questions about the orientation, the home and the selection committee, call 625-1010.

Also, Habitat for Humanity is seeking committee volunteers to help select a family for the home in San Rafael. Volunteers on the Family Selection Committee will help at orientation meetings, application turn-in meetings, home visits and the final family selection. To volunteer, attend a special training meeting from 6-8 p.m. Feb. 16 in the Kennedy Room at Saint Raphael Church.