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**Memphis Habitat Breaks Ground on Four New Homes Friday;
Habitat International on track to build 1,000 homes in Gulf Coast by summer**
18 months after storms, recovery work continues to help low-income families

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – Eighteen months after Hurricane Katrina swept over the Gulf Coast, Habitat for Humanity is closing in on its initial 1,000-house goal to help low-income families displaced by the storm. Meanwhile Memphis Habitat continues its mission of eliminating substandard housing locally with the construction of four new homes, starting Friday morning on Jennette Place, just off of Mississippi Boulevard in Lemoyne West.

To date, more than 700 homes have been built or are under construction with plans to meet the organization's goal of having its first 1,000 houses completed or under construction by mid-summer. Habitat plans to continue building once the first 1,000 homes are completed.

Habitat for Humanity has already begun to acquire land and plan for the next 1,000 homes, which will help ensure that local affiliates will be able to deliver affordable houses to qualifying low-income families whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged during the 2005 hurricane season.

"I am proud of the exceptional work that dedicated Habitat for Humanity affiliates, volunteers, supporters and employees are doing in the Gulf Coast recovery," said Jonathan Reckford, CEO of Habitat for Humanity International. "The 2005 hurricanes are memorable not only for the shocking devastation they caused but also for the shocking poverty they revealed. Through the homes being built today, Habitat will make a difference in the lives of low-income, hurricane-affected families now and for generations to come."

Memphis Habitat built six sets of house panels as part of the *Operation Home Delivery* response effort. The homes were shipped via barge to the coast in the months immediately following the hurricanes. The affiliate also refurbished five of its existing homes and made them available to hurricane evacuees rent-free. In the coming months, Memphis Habitat plans to build two brand new homes for hurricane-affected families still living in the Memphis area.

"We are grateful for the outpouring of support we have received from donors and volunteers after the devastating hurricanes," said Dwayne Spencer, executive director of Memphis Habitat.

“Habitat for Humanity is truly blessed by those who work to make simple, decent and affordable housing possible in partnership with families in need.”

Habitat partnered with Church World Service to help fund the repair of 500 homes for low-income families and with The Salvation Army to increase building capacity, provide housing for volunteers, and make homes along the Gulf Coast more affordable. Lutheran Social Services and other Katrina Aid Today consortium members are also actively engaged in helping families find appropriate housing solutions, including Habitat homes. Habitat volunteers have also helped remove debris and clean thousands of homes in preparation for their rehabilitation.

“While Habitat for Humanity is not a first-response organization, we believe that low-income families affected by the 2005 hurricanes need a hand up to rebuild their homes and their lives,” said Ken Meinert, senior vice president of Operation Home Delivery and the U.S./Canada Area Office for Habitat for Humanity International. “Habitat has been involved in helping to rebuild permanent housing after disasters for nearly 15 years and we consider this work an important part of our housing ministry.”

Habitat for Humanity has spent nearly half of the about \$128 million in contributions received to date for its hurricane recovery work. About 90 cents of every dollar has gone directly to program costs, including land acquisition, development and construction materials.

“We’re not a disaster relief or first-responder organization, and house-building isn’t done overnight,” said Meinert. “We were at work in the Gulf Coast communities before the hurricanes hit and we will be there as long as there is a need and we have the resources to help. Prudent spending on land and materials will make our donors’ dollars go further, and eventually will result in more houses.”

Meinert said Habitat for Humanity’s current funding will pay for at least 2,000 new homes in the region.

Habitat for Humanity continues to seek volunteers for its hurricane recovery efforts. Volunteers can register and donations can be made online at www.habitat.org, or by calling 1-800-Habitat (422-4828).

Memphis Habitat’s Spring Build, which begins on Friday, is sponsored by the following: FedEx, Tennessee Valley Authority, Germantown United Methodist Church, Germantown Presbyterian Church, Medtronic, Cargill, Northwest Airlines, Cummins, Wells Fargo, Primacy Relocation, Stewart-Jackson Pharmacal, International Paper/New Fellowship Ministries and various area high schools.

About Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. Memphis Habitat has built 285 homes since its founding in 1983. Habitat houses are built with volunteer labor and sold to partner families, at no profit and with no interest charged. Partner families make a down payment and invest hundreds of hours of “sweat equity” into the construction of their homes and other Habitat homes.

About Habitat for Humanity International

Habitat for Humanity International is an ecumenical Christian ministry that welcomes to its work all people dedicated to the cause of eliminating poverty housing. Since its founding in Americus, Ga., in 1976, Habitat has built more than 200,000 houses in nearly 100 countries, providing simple, decent and affordable shelter for more than 1 million people. For more information, visit www.habitat.org.