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Dianne Stickney, chair of the Habitat for Humanity board of directors, announces the second phase of its project on Howe Drive in Kitchener on Tuesday.

Habitat for Humanity project ready to grow

By Valerie Hill, Record staff

KITCHENER — While it might not be unusual for the mother of two young daughters to journal daily, the subject matter certainly is unusual for Habiba Qassim.

“Every day I write in that journal what I did today,” said Qassim who has been working alongside other Habitat for Humanity volunteers, building the townhouse that will become her family’s first home in Canada.

Digging the basement, laying floors, building walls — she has been involved in every aspect of building her home and she doesn’t want to forget a single exhausting but rewarding moment.

“They say ‘go do that’ and I say ‘yes,’” said Qassim, who believes her confidence level has soared since discovering she’s pretty handy with a hammer.

She was one of several volunteers, politicians and Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region staffers at Tuesday morning’s announcement of another phase at the 23 Howe Dr. development in Kitchener. When complete, it will feature 16 townhouse units with one accessible unit. She said her daughters, age nine and seven, are beyond excited about having their own rooms and insist on visiting the construction site.

“My husband is so proud,” said Qassim, who came to Canada from Somalia in 1995 and currently lives in a rented townhouse with her family.

Janet Dodds has also been enthusiastically helping build the unit that will

house her family of four kids. Like the Qassims, Dodds and her husband have been helping build their new home. “My husband is taking ownership that he is building our house,” she said. “He feels pride.”

Recipients of Habitat for Humanity homes start by undergoing a lengthy application process, one that can take up to a year.

Family co-ordinator JoAnn Lewis explained “they have to open their lives to us. We have to be sure they can manage when we are gone. They have to prepare themselves going from renters to owners. It’s always a transition.”

Once accepted, applicants must provide 500 hours of sweat equity in lieu of a down payment, meaning they help build their home. If physically unable, other tasks are assigned.

Ken Freeman, Habitat’s executive director, said they look for land that most large-scale developers would reject because of issues such as zoning, which tend to mean the land is less expensive.

The organization has moved toward building townhouses instead of detached homes, largely because of costs.

That first phase of the Howe Drive development was sponsored by Toyota and this second phase, as announced Tuesday, is sponsored by Manulife Financial.

In its 23-year history in Waterloo Region, Habitat for Humanity has built 89 homes for low-income families.

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