

Heritage Building Corporation Partnering with Habitat for Humanity for Office Renovations.

This excerpt is from the *East Mississippi Business Journal* Page 22 September 2007 Edition.

Habitat for Humanity: Renovating its offices and its organization

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Fonda Rush, Executive Director of Lauderdale County Habitat for Humanity, says, "This renovation is different for Habitat, in that we're not doing the work. Habitat will do some of the demolition, but because this is a commercial building, we will have to use contractors who are more familiar with that kind of construction"

Habitat is also concerned that if it handled the renovation, it might interfere with its mission. Rush continues, "We don't want to pull away from our program of building residential homes. We would have to stop that for a while to renovate our building."

Fortunately, Habitat has someone with a deep understanding of commercial property on its board. Rush explains, "Tim Allred is our board president, and he has worked a lot on the design of the renovation, namely the best use of the building. That is his expertise-taking older buildings and renovating for the best design and use of that building."

For more on this article refer to the *East Mississippi Business Journal*.
Article written by Kirk Thompson

PAGE 22 • September 2007

East Mississippi Business Journal

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The new Habitat building will have several uses, in addition to being administrative office space. There will be training rooms for Habitat families to learn about homeownership and budgeting. Habitat committees and the Habitat board will go through the training as well.

Another use of the rooms will be for small groups of volunteers who come to Lauderdale County to work with Habitat. Rush explains, "We will be able to convert the training rooms into living quarters. Volunteers can actually stay in the building. We will take one office space in the building, and it will be converted into two, separate, handicap-accessible bathrooms with showers. We are also upgrading our kitchen."

It was in December 1998 that Habitat purchased the building under renovation located at 1001 29th Avenue. At that time, there was a business in the building called the Diving Board. There was a gift shop in the front of the building and a swimming pool shop behind the gift shop. Rush says, "It is a really good location for Habitat, because we're a neighborhood organization. It gave us room, up front, for office space, and the old swimming pool shop is where we keep our materials and tools."

Regarding the funding of the renovation,



Greg Hatcher, Tim Allred and Fonda Rush with Lowe's personnel outside of the Habitat office.

Rush explains, "The biggest obstacle is funding, because Habitat has never before gone into the community and asked for money. Our funding comes from donations in church budgets and the homeowner's house payments. So, we have had to make a switch from our fundraising and grant-writing."

To help with funding, Habitat will hold a yard sale on October 6, Rush says, "We're going to be selling extra building materials and office equipment, both new and used. Last year, Roy Anderson Corporation donated some building materials to us—some we could use, some we couldn't. Also,

Lowe's has donated some materials to Habitat. We have new interior door units. We will have some hardware, plumbing items, and office furniture."

Habitat's presence in the community has grown tremendously in the past two years. Prior to Katrina, Habitat was building 2 to 3 homes per year. Since Katrina, the organization has built 17 homes, 13 of which are brand-new construction. Habitat knows now that it can build a lot of homes. However, building homes is not the only enterprise that Habitat practices. Rush says, "We are a construction company, and we are a mortgage company. Even though we have a partnership with Citizens National Bank for processing house payments, Habitat oversees the homeowner's house payments. Habitat owns the mortgages."

If any organization deserves a new building, it is certainly Lauderdale County Habitat for Humanity—an organization that has given so much and asked for so little. Every home that Habitat builds is one more dream fulfilled for a family. Surely, Meridian and Lauderdale County can help Habitat fulfill its dream of a newly-renovated building—a building that will be used to better serve our community. ●