

Habitat for Humanity: Harnessing the power of partnerships

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We've had 124 groundbreaking at Habitat for Humanity Vail Valley and built more than 100 homes since 1995, but we've had only one craning in, which took place earlier this month. No matter how many times we break ground, move dirt or start construction, it never gets old.

It's emotional, watching 16 homes being craned into place thinking how that means 16 families will have the stability that comes from building and owning a home.

The only way we've been able to build incremental homes — especially as construction costs continue to rise — is through the help of our partners. We can do something about the housing crisis *because* of our partnerships. There is so much talk about housing nationwide, statewide, countywide, but the craning in is where the rubber meets the road.

We're always looking to build partnerships and build more housing for our community by leveraging the Habitat brand and our expertise. We bring our knowledge in affordable homebuilding, first-time homebuyer education and support with the goal of creating opportunities for our local workforce to stay here long term. Organizations — towns, local government, developers — all have different tools in their toolbox. Our role at Habitat is to bring these various groups to the table to make the best use of our collective tools.

This happened recently as we partnered with Eagle County and the town of Vail to bring affordable homeownership within Vail. Timber Ridge will be redeveloped — much needed after 40 years — and 10 of the homes will be permanently affordable Habitat homes filled with hardworking locals who enhance to the fabric of the community. These are ten incremental affordable homeownership opportunities.

More than a homebuilder

We're excited to be working with Vail, Eagle County and Triumph Development. We all have to work together, bringing our different expertise to the development to build a dream — to build homes. It's a simple idea really and we are so excited to be working with different organizations, putting all the pieces together. After almost 30 years in the home-building arena, it's intuitive for us.

Habitat is more than a home builder: Habitat brings our tools as a community builder, family services connector, mortgage lender with a zero-interest loan, and relationships with local families as part of the partnership.

We are harnessing the power of Habitat's zero-interest loan product to bring maximum affordability for families. Bringing community partners together to buy down the cost of the homes, plus the zero-interest loan, creates our chance to build capacity that won't tax our construction team.

Timber Ridge represents new, innovative thinking and is something we envision to be easily replicable in other communities. We have limited resources (land, water), we're thinking about our work differently and expanding how we can help locals establish strong foundations in the community.

We are so excited that through these partnerships, we will bring, and keep, families in town. If we want to retain people, keep the fabric of our community, keep Vail vibrant, there must be homeownership opportunities.

While we are celebrating these giant strides and strong partnerships, we are always looking to expand who we work with. New ideas come about through conversation and connection — so reach out, I love talking about housing, partnering and solutions.

Elyse Howard is the director of development at Habitat for Humanity Vail Valley. Over the past 30 years, the nonprofit has increased home building and continues to seek innovative ways to increase homeownership opportunities.