



# ARIZONA JEWISH POST

Volume 64, Issue 19 11 Tishrei 5769 October 10, 2008 85¢

Visit [jewishtucson.org](http://jewishtucson.org) for everything Jewish in Tucson and Southern Arizona

Home & Garden

pages 13-18



## Tzedek Build comes amid financial crisis



Tommy Teye and wife, Benetta Grant, with their daughter, Secret, will invest 400 hours of 'sweat equity' before moving into the Tzedek Build Habitat for Humanity home next year.

**SHEILA WILENSKY**

AJP Assistant Editor

**Y**ou might think that even with the current mortgage crisis, members of the Tucson Jewish community aren't suffering from home foreclosures, but you'd be wrong, says Jonathan Rothschild, co-chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council Tzedek Build. There are also members of the community, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who live in unsatisfactory housing.

The Tzedek Build, which will create a new home for a local refugee family in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity Tucson, reflects the JCRC executive committee's desire to move beyond the past seven years' Make a Difference Day to "find a way for more extended social altruism," says Josh Protas, JRCR director.

It also ties into the goals of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the JCRC's national parent organization, which this year is making fighting poverty — including advocating for affordable housing — the cornerstone of its agenda.

The kickoff drive for the Tzedek Build will take place at the JCRC annual meeting and luncheon on Friday, Oct. 17 at 11:30 a.m. at the Tucson Jewish Community Center.

Nationally, "Fighting Poverty with Faith: A Week of Action," an interfaith initiative launched last month by JCPA and other national organizations such as Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Catholic Charities USA and the Islamic Society of North America, urges elected officials and candidates to adequately address poverty.

See Build, page 2

### BUILD

continued from page 1

In Tucson, it isn't only the poverty-stricken who are suffering from the current financial crisis. Says Rothschild, who helps administer a tax credit fund through Temple Emanu-El, "This year we see two to three times more people having trouble making their mortgage payments on their homes."

Those needing assistance are "equally divided" between Jews and non-Jews, he says, adding that the members of the Jewish community who are coming forth are "not only Temple members, but [others who are both] affiliated and non-affiliated."

The Tzedek Build will help Liberian refugees Tommy Teye, his wife, Benetta Grant, and their daughter, Secret, move into their new home in winter 2009. The family, who came to Tucson in 2004, was resettled by Jewish Family & Children's Service.

"I lost almost all my family in the civil war in Liberia," says Teye. "I wanted to go somewhere where there was no war, where I could learn." Immigrants often must have family members awaiting them in their new countries; when Teye was in a Liberian refugee camp he thought, "Maybe I couldn't go. I had no hope."

But there was a process in place to help

the Teye family. Jill Rich, board chair of the newly formed Jewish Refugee Resettlement of Southern Arizona, explains that when people are in refugee camps, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees applies to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for access to refugee relocation agencies.

Since JFCS closed its resettlement program, JRRSA has been on tap to resettle refugees in Tucson.

"We've resettled 110 people since we began approximately six months ago," says Rich. "That's a very, very high number." After 9/11, she says, the number of resettled refugees "went down to a trickle. The U.N. organized, trying to beef up their process. We were ready to go."

"There were 356 active clients who were eligible for services already through JFCS," she says. "Of those we're actively working with about 60," which is how Teye and his family came to the new resettlement organization's attention, says Rich. "We have a mission to help everybody, not just the Jewish community."

"The Teye family is very unique. They started helping other refugees soon after they got here, which," she says, "is unusual for refugees who are still struggling themselves. It's very heartwarming. Tommy Teye is a real mensch."

It was like a dream to come here with his

wife and daughter, says Teye. "JFCS became our family. I want to help others because I'm alive today because I was helped by others."

Teye has started his own nonprofit, Voice for International Children's Committee, and is working on a degree in social work at Pima Community College. He also works as a caregiver at the Blake Foundation and serves as an interpreter for Liberian and other African refugees.

Habitat for Humanity Tucson is the mortgage lender for the Teye family's new home. The organization purchases the land and is in charge of the home building; it has been in Tucson for 28 years, with over 285 homes built, says Executive Director Michael McDonald.

To run Habitat for Humanity, it takes "roughly 55 percent philanthropic contributions; 15 to 20 percent public funding, such as from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; and the remainder is from collecting mortgage payments," says McDonald.

Around \$85,000 is needed to build the Teyes' house, says JCRC's Protas. So far, the contributions include \$10,000 from JCRC; \$5,000 from the 1st Rate, 2nd Hand Thrift Store; \$3,600 from the Tucson Board of Rabbis; and \$1,000 from the National Bank of Arizona, which has been a longtime supporter of Make a Difference Day.

The Teyes' home will be of market quality at a \$150,000 appraisal and they'll pay a \$600 monthly mortgage payment that includes insurance and taxes, says McDonald. The family will have to work 400 hours on the construction of their house as part of a "sweat equity program," he says, which will give the Teyes an "opportunity to form fellowship and solidarity" with JCRC volunteers.

McDonald started talking about a Habitat-JCRC collaboration with Protas when they went on a Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona multi-faith mission to Israel in summer 2005. As a practicing Catholic, says MacDonald, he enjoys "connecting to other faiths personally and professionally."

Jon Fenton, the other Tzedek Build co-chair, has had similar experiences. He and employees of A.F. Sterling Homes, of which he is president, have volunteered for Habitat for Humanity for around seven years. "The camaraderie you get working with fellow employees and doing something positive for others," he says, is meaningful.

"It would be wonderful if this is the start of an annual Habitat build," says Rich. Having a home is "something we take for granted. It's so important for people to have housing stability."

The cost for the JCRC annual meeting is \$30. RSVP online at [jewishtucson.org](http://jewishtucson.org) or contact Jane Scott at 577-9393 or [jscott@jfsa.org](mailto:jscott@jfsa.org).