

https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/beautiful-new-beginning-displaced-iraqi-family-getting-habitat-home/article_707f3f3f-59e5-539b-ac20-f8ca385268bd.html

'Beautiful new beginning': Displaced Iraqi family getting Habitat home

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com

Jul 31, 2022



Ahmed Hadi talks with Lisa Jones of Habitat for Humanity International townhome for Hadi, his three siblings and their parents as part of Habita

[DON SERGENT/dsergent@bgdailynews.com](mailto:DON_SERGENT@dsergent@bgdailynews.com)

**MORE
INFORMATION**



'Crazy project' to build 10 Habitat homes coming together

Couple displaced by tornado settles in 'container home'

Ahmed Hadi watched as a crane lifted a truss up to where he was standing Thursday on the second floor of what will be a four-bedroom townhome housing him and his five other family members on Regis O'Connor Boulevard.

His fellow workers saw two-by-fours and plywood; Hadi saw a miracle.

“It’s going to be a beautiful new beginning for us,” the 24-year-old Hadi said, reflecting on the family’s struggles since the home they were renting on Moss Creek Avenue was destroyed in the December tornadoes. “We’ll finally get the opportunity to settle down. It has been eight months since the tornado, and we haven’t settled yet.”

Now Hadi, his parents and three younger siblings will have a place to call home, thanks to an ambitious Habitat for Humanity project to build 10 townhomes in 10 weeks.

That project turned the Durbin Estates subdivision into a beehive of activity this past week, as more than

100 volunteers from local companies like Fruit of the Loom and Foreman Watson Land Title mixed with Habitat workers from Louisville and other areas in a frenzy of sawing, hammering and lifting.

Nothing like the “Build Blitz” project has been attempted before in Bowling Green, according to local Habitat Executive Director Rodney Goodman, but the December tornadoes that destroyed or damaged hundreds of homes made such a project a necessity in a city where affordable housing was already in short supply.

Goodman said Thursday the project was slightly behind on its goal of getting all the townhomes under roof by week’s end, which would allow the 10 residences to be completed in time for an October ribbon-cutting.

That fast-tracked timeline “is unlike anything I’ve been in charge of before,” said Bryan Reaka, faculty adviser for Western Kentucky University’s Habitat chapter.

Reaka, who teaches construction management and architecture, was joined Thursday by several current WKU students and even some alumni as they worked alongside those like Hadi who will become homeowners once the project is completed.

“It keeps me energized working with the students and seeing the excitement in their eyes,” Reaka said.

That excitement, though, paled in comparison to the emotions being felt by Hadi and his family.

Apartment-hopping since December, the family of six is now living in The Hub development along Lovers Lane while trying to put the tragic events of December behind them.

“It’s a blessing for us,” Hadi said. “The process of recovery has been very long. It’s not easy. There are a lot of things you have to do.”



With his father, Jalal Saleh, injured so severely in the tornado that he hasn't yet been able to return to his job as an automobile mechanic, Hadi has shouldered much of the burden of arranging temporary housing and applying for the Habitat home.

Hadi, who works as a forklift operator at DHL Supply Chain in Bowling Green, hopes settling in a new home can help him and his family put the horrific night of last Dec. 10-11 behind them.

"It (the tornado) came really fast, right toward our house," Hadi recalled. "Then there was no house. We were in the back yard after the

tornado, and my dad was injured very badly. He had multiple fractures.”

Hadi and his family lived on the street where a total of 10 members of two different families were killed in the storm.

“It was a great neighborhood,” Hadi said. “We lived there almost 10 years and saw that part of town grow. It was devastating for the whole community.”

For Hadi, his parents and an 18-year-old brother, the tornado was the latest in a number of difficulties the Iraqi refugees have endured.

“We left Baghdad and went to Syria and then came here in 2012,” said Hadi, who has siblings aged 6 and 9 who were born in Bowling Green. “We’ve seen a lot of things as far as war and crimes, but I never thought we’d be in a natural disaster. It was very terrifying.”

Hadi, who lost another brother in an accidental shooting in 2018, was glad to don work gloves and a hard hat

Thursday as a way of getting closer to having a home that may allow him to put the hardships behind him.

“I have no experience in construction,” he said. “But I’m eager to learn and get my hands dirty.”

His 55-year-old father, still using a walker to get around, wasn’t able to contribute his own “sweat equity” to the project.

Instead, he joined 9-year-old son Oras at the work site and tried to express the joy he felt in seeing the home take shape.

“My home is good,” said Saleh, gesturing toward the two-story structure. “Thank you, Bowling Green.”

– *Follow business reporter Don Sergent on Twitter @BGDNbusiness or visit bgdailynews.com.*