

Tennessean.com

November 20, 2007

Habitat for Humanity gears up for Thanksgiving Day tradition

5K run boosts awareness of affordable housing

By *CHIP CIRILLO*
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Don Bittick can't remember who won last year's Habitrot 5-kilometer road race.

The point of the race, said its director, is to make sure everyone remembers that affordable housing is an important issue, even in Williamson County, one of the nation's most affluent areas.

The Habitrot is likely to raise \$18,000 to \$20,000 for Habitat for Humanity when a field of 1,200 to 1,500 runners competes in the seventh annual race Thursday.

The 5K course circles CoolSprings Galleria and travels down a section of Bakers Bridge Avenue. The event also includes a Fun Run for kids.

"Most people think that Williamson County is this rich, affluent county, which it is to some extent, but we still have a lot of need for affordable housing here as well," Bittick said. "I've been told by several people that a lot of the lower-income families that do work in Williamson County can't afford to live in Williamson County, so they drive in from surrounding counties just to work here."

Bittick said Habitat for Humanity tries to build at least 10 houses per year in the county, most of them in Franklin and Spring Hill. Students from local high schools work as program volunteers and fundraisers.

"We're in a four-year initiative right now to build 46 houses," said Steve Lewis, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Williamson County. "We cater to families that earn between \$20,000 and \$40,000 who live and work in Williamson County. Finding affordable housing for them is kind of our focus right now."

The Boulevard Bolt 10K in Belle Meade also is held on Thanksgiving, but Bittick said the Habitrot appeals to different types of runners.

"We don't compete with them, and we're not going to try to compete with them because they have a well-established, long-running 10K race that they have every year on Thanksgiving morning," Bittick said. "Ours is more family-oriented, and we have more family-friendly type things going on at our race. We do have some good runners that come here, but I don't think it's as competitive as the Bolt."

The Habitrot often includes out-of-town relatives in for the holiday from states such as Texas, Kansas, Illinois and South Carolina.