

# Proving themselves from the ground up

Committed to community engagement and her involvement in church-based groups, Sheila Rainford was inspired to build a Habitat chapter in the Pioneer Valley when she read an article in the newspaper in 1986, which showcased Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter working on home insecurity-related issues in Brooklyn. At the end of the article, there was an address to write for more information. Sheila was so touched that she wrote to get involved, and within two days she received a letter from Habitat for Humanity founder Millard Fuller himself, who put her in touch with a group of a few people who wanted to start a chapter. After partnering with the Housing Task Force at College Church in Northampton and getting a helping hand from the Springfield Habitat chapter, they were able to garner enough support to start a chapter of their own.

*"We got together with [the group from College Church in Northampton], and we decided the river was not going to get in our way! Between us, we had enough people and enthusiasm to get a chapter started."*

Within Pioneer Valley Habitat, Sheila's primary role was all about publicity. She helped organize the initial Family Selection Committee, and her broader outreach efforts focused on ensuring that the larger community understood what Pioneer Valley Habitat was achieving in their area. They were not a household giveaway, they were a helping hand up, not a hand out. While she was attending a fair to spread the word of the newly established Habitat chapter, she met Doris McLeod, who signed on and later became a very active volunteer. Both Sheila and Doris focused their attention on involving local church groups in Habitat's work.

When asked what the most pivotal experience at Habitat was, she referred to the building of the very first Habitat home in the area. She reminisced on the difficulties surrounding this first build, and how the support from David Crosby (a pastor at the Baptist church in Amherst) helped them raise money to buy land for the construction of their first home. Although their fundraising efforts weren't quite enough to buy their first lot of land, the kindness and generosity of the community at the Baptist Church of Amherst didn't stop there: "One of his parishioners had a piece of land that he could have sold for a small fortune, but he gave it to us at his cost. So we were able to prove ourselves by building our first house on Pine Brook Curve in Northampton."

Sheila sees her experience at Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity as one that showed her God's love in the world and how people get brought together to support and uplift one another. She continues to have an active role in the Christian community and actively participates in South Congregational Church and the Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program to help those in need.

