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BROADWAY BUILDS

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

BY MEGAN FRANK

ne Monday last fall, a troupe of show people descended on an apartment building in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. They donned gold hard hats and brandished shovels and paintbrushes. It wasn't street theater; it was the first Broadway Builds event with Habitat for Humanity of New York City.

Actors and actresses — including Patrick Stewart, Laura Linney, Michael Cerveris and event organizer Emily Bergl — joined producers, writers and musicians to help Habitat revitalize eight units inside and landscape outside. The event was part of Habitat New York City's "100 homes in Brooklyn" initiative, which aims to build or rehab 100 properties in the borough by 2014.



PHOTOS BY ANTHONY COLLINS

1/7 Actresses Zakiya Young, Carrie Preston and Kimberly Marable, joined by Jonathan Marable, are all smiles as they help paint a living room.

Bergl, who has volunteered regularly with Habitat since her first Global Village trip in 2008, noticed her friends and colleagues taking an interest in her photos from various builds. They began asking how to get involved with Habitat themselves. “I thought, ‘Why not create a special day where everyone can come out together and contribute right here in New York?’” she says. “The Broadway community has done so much for the AIDS

crisis with ‘Broadway Cares,’ and I felt like the need for affordable housing was something that folks in the theater can also connect to. When I approached Habitat New York City they jumped right on it, and we immediately starting organizing.”

Producers Jordan Roth and Daryl Roth, actor Michael Cerveris, writer Stephen Belber, and Bergl co-chaired the event, working with Broadway Serves and Habitat New York City to organize the build day. Nearly 40 volunteers came out to work, and work they did. “People were so happy that they could really help out instead of just showing up for a picture,” she says. “To be honest, I didn’t think we’d have such an amazing turn out our first year. After all, I was asking theater people to show up in Brooklyn on their one day off to do manual labor.”

With the 2012 event being a hit, the first Broadway Builds event won’t be the last. “The event was a huge success for Habitat New York City, both in terms of the feedback we received from the volunteers as well as the impact it had on sharing our mission with the greater New York community,” says Carly Blatt, the affiliate’s marketing and communications director. “We plan to make Broadway Builds an annual event, and many of this year’s participants have already let us know they’d like to volunteer again.”



Volunteers gather for instructions at Broadway Builds 2012.

ANTHONY COLLINS

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