



Everything New Orleans

The Times-Picayune

Donated car can help build a family home

Habitat program an easy way to give

Wednesday, January 09, 2008

By Carroll Devine

St. Tammany bureau

Maybe you'd love to donate some of your time to Habitat for Humanity because you believe in the work they do, building affordable homes for low-income families, but you don't have enough time to spare.

On the other hand, maybe you have a used vehicle that you need to part with. In that case, both you and Habitat are in luck.

Their national "Cars for Homes" program has created a win-win situation, with Habitat for Humanity able to accept donations of cars, trucks, boats, motorcycles, RVs and other vehicles. They then sell the vehicles through automobile auctions, recyclers or salvage yards to raise money that helps in the construction of homes, said Maureen Clary, executive director of Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West.

Funds generated from the sale of the vehicles benefits the local Habitat where the donation is made. The Cars for Homes program began in fall 2003 in the Seattle area, and since that time the sales have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"We have always had individuals donate cars, boats and RVs," Clary said. "However, our affiliate would have to handle the pickup, do the title transfer, and attempt to resell the donated items locally. This program makes it much easier on both the donor and HFHSTW as the recipient." Since Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit organization, it may be possible for donors to claim deductions on their income tax returns, if they itemize. In general, donors can deduct the fair market value of any car up to \$499. If it sells for more than \$500, the full price can be deducted.

The kicker is, "The tax deduction is often more than what they could sell the vehicle for," Clary said, "and they know that their donation will go towards eliminating substandard housing in St. Tammany Parish."

Recently, Mandeville resident Beth Brantley decided to donate her car for the cause when she heard about the Cars for Homes program. "I have supported our local Habitat for many years," she said, "donating to the Home Store, helping to build houses, and helping with fundraisers like Women Build. Donating my vehicle was another way to support their mission.

"The proceeds go to our local Habitat, and I knew the donation would be far more beneficial to

them than what I would get on a trade-in," Brantley said.

Though the program gratefully accepts almost all vehicles, even snowmobiles and trailers, boats and planes may require a call to see if they meet minimum criteria, Clary said.

The vehicle doesn't even have to be running, but it must be "whole" and have four inflated tires so that it can be moved by the towing operators.

All vehicle donations are processed as quickly as possible, Clary said. Typically, the vehicle will be picked up within two or three days after the title is received in the processing center, and you can speed up the process by downloading documents online.

Most states require that you have a clear title to the vehicle, and some that you have a notarized signature. Louisiana and California also require an additional form. But Habitat will provide the necessary form and will even help you find a lost title, Clary said.

Car donations are processed by Advanced Remarketing Services Inc., Habitat for Humanity International's authorized national agent, and 100 percent of the proceeds are returned to Habitat St. Tammany West.

An individual's donation could make a significant difference to a home building effort.

For example, "The proceeds from the donation of one car could pay for the cost of a bathtub in a family partner's home, a roof over their head, or a beautifully landscaped front yard," Clary said. "The donation of a large RV could sponsor all or part of a family partner home.

"It's easy to do, and another way to support our mission," Clary said, "and our affiliate has a waiting list of over 200 families who need safe, decent, affordable housing."

Donations can be made by calling 1 (877) 277-4344 or visiting www.carsforhomes.org. Clary added, "Be sure to designate Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West as the affiliate of your choice."

Published on NOLA.com Wednesday, January 9, 2008 2:53 p.m.

Published in The Times-Picayune Thursday, January 10, 2008