

## VI Formers Help Build Affordable Houses with Habitat for Humanity

Will Robinson, Sep 1 2012

Amidst a chorus of banging hammers and a late summer heat, Jack Flynn '13 contemplated the dilemma in front of him. He'd been working all day with Martin French '13 and Kieran Conaway '13 securing the framed walls on the second floor of several housing units. The walls needed to be reinforced to ensure that they could hold the weight of the roofs that would later be installed. The 2x4s he had to work with were too short to reach diagonally across the framing from top to bottom, so Jack needed to extend their length by hammering on a short extension piece on top. The result bore a resemblance to an elongated Tetris piece.

With such a piece in hand, Jack carefully nailed it to the upper left corner and bottom right corner of what would eventually be the interior wall of a hall closet. After about 20 minutes of hammering his cobbled 2x4 sidearm on top of a ladder and then hunched over with an upside down swing of his hammer he believed he was finished. He gave the wall a firm push to check his work. This is where the dilemma emerged. The wall didn't stand firm. It shook. Jack examined his work and wondered what had gone wrong. The answer was at eye level.

Jack needed to secure his 2x4 somewhere near the center. But there was a problem. There was a 1" gap between his securing piece of wood and the wooden stud of the wall. Closer examination revealed that the short piece he had attached was the culprit. Well, more accurately, he realized that the way he had nailed it to the frame bore the greatest blame. Think of a lightening bolt shape with both ends attached to the same straight plane. That bowed crook in the middle was where it crossed the middle stud in the frame. The solution was simply, though not exactly appealing. If he flipped the board over then the top would remain flush, the middle would become flush, and he could secure the bottom by wedging it with another small piece. It meant a lot more work, including undoing the all of the hard work he had already put in.

At some point in any difficult project a person inevitably comes to a point where they have to ask themselves if they want to do it "right" or do it "easy." Jack was at that point. Seconds later, the board was hammered out of the frame.

Members of the VI Form experienced dozens of similar moments over two days this week as they joined forces with Habitat for Humanity to help build affordable housing for residents of North Wilmington. Students worked on several different stages of the building site that will ultimately lead to 21 new houses. For some, it was the first time they'd ever framed out a wall while others had extensive experience with Habitat or similar organizations in their hometowns. "We had a great time," said Peter D'Agostino '13. "We split up into groups and helped out by removing old insulation, painting, siding, setting up silt screens and cleaning up the job site. The best part was how excited everyone was to go and help out despite the 6:30 a.m. departure from campus on what would have otherwise been a free day."

The days' successes paved the way for future trips to the project site. "It would be great to keep going back this fall," said photography teacher Joshua Meier. "It's incredible to see how Habitat's managed to transform an entire neighborhood and I think the students are even more motivated now to help see it through to the end."