Fire destroys Greeley Area Habitat home

Weld County builders donate time, materials to rebuild home in time for family's move

by Kim Jackson

It was six a.m. The July sun had already been up for well over an hour and all signs pointed to another beautiful day. Tomas Landin looked out his from his two-bedroom apartment window and saw the smoke rise from a house burning a block away in the Greeley Area Habitat for Humanity's subdivision, Timemann Village. Wait a minute. Smoke? Could that mean fire? Was the house he helped to build — *his* house — on fire?

He raced over to the subdivision with his wife and three children, panic rising in his throat. As the landscaper for the Greeley Country Club arrived at his new home, he saw that everything he had helped to build was destroyed. While the fire was gone, the smoke was still thick and he could see it was ruined beyond repair. With a closing date just six weeks away and no idea how he'd ever be able to move into his new home now, Landin and his family collapsed into tears.

In broken English, he said, "I wake up and be ready to go to work. Some neighbor from here (Timemann Village) call me and say, 'Hey, I have bad news.' All my family be crying. I don't go to work and I stay here all morning."

With only one wall standing after a teenage arsonist destroyed the home in July, the Landin family wondered how they could possibly move.

The fire was so hot the foundation peeled and the house had to be rebuilt from the foundation up.

Tom Chegolla, executive director for the Greeley Area Habitat for Humanity, explained that a 13-year-old teenager had set the house on fire. "It was a devastating experience for us and the Landin family because they literally saw their dreams go up in smoke."

Even the foundation was ruined. "The fire was so intense, it sucked all the moisture out of the foundation," he added.

A volunteer looks at the charred remains of the Landin family home before rebuilding begins.

Timing is everything

That morning, John Fassler, owner of John Fassler Custom Homes, was having coffee with a friend, Lou Cangilla, who chaired the Construction Committee for the Greeley Area Habitat for Humanity, when Cangilla's phone rang. Chegolla was on the other end and told him what had happened. Cangilla looked at Fassler and before handing the phone to him, told Chegolla, "Here's the guy you need to talk to."

The pair made their way to the site and once there, Chegolla recounted, "they couldn't believe what they actually saw." Fassler saw the emotional tragedy this had on the Landin family. "Here's Tomas Landin, a grown man, crying, hurt and I think it really touched John's heart."

Builders and suppliers completely rebuild home

It just so happened that the Weld County Builders Association had a meeting scheduled for that evening. Fassler, who is treasurer for the 49-year-old association, added the fire to the agenda under New Business and proposed they partner with Habitat to rebuild the house to where it was before the fire. "I knew right away that this was something I should do. We had been discussing ways to get involved and help Habitat out because it's such a nice fit with our organization. It seemed like a natural thing to do. The house needed to be rebuilt, and for it to have as little impact on the homeowners, we needed to quickly rebuild it," Fassler said.

Chegolla was at that meeting. "It was pretty emotional. The people there were so touched by what had happened, that they said, 'Let's not just do it to where it was at. Let's take it all the way to the end and do

How you can help the Greeley Area Habitat for Humanity

The October 1 dedication of five homes in Timemann Village was a big step for the Greeley Area Habitat. In fact, Timemann Village is the biggest Habitat subdivision of its kind in the 13-state western region, with 60 homes and a family resource center on site.

"It's sort of unusual," said Tom Chegolla, the Greeley Area Habitat's executive director. "It's becoming more unusual now because the cost of land is so expensive."

Faced with buying lots from a developer with a minimum $55,000 price tag, then adding water, sewer and builder fees to the tune of another $18,000, "you already have that much without digging a hole," he noted. "The one variable we have is that we can control the cost of the land. And the way you do that is by developing your own land."

Although it was expensive for the small non-profit agency to take it on, each lot was just $27,500. "That's how we're able to keep the cost of our homes down, so they're affordable. We build our homes at zero interest and with no profit."

Consider for a moment the families who help build their homes with Habitat earn an average of eight or nine dollars an hour. Based on their earnings and that that they don't have enough for a down payment, Chegolla explained, in a typical market, "they would never be able to buy a home." Families are now living in seven of the homes there.

Want to help? Donate your time to Habitat to build a home. Or join the Weld County Builders Association. As part of its three-year strategic plan, Chegolla wants to partner with the builders to build one house a year for Habitat families. "This is the Weld County Builders Association's Extreme Makeover," he joked.

Greeley Area Habitat for Humanity
Tom Chegolla, Executive Director
104 North 16th Ave.
Greeley, CO 80631
e-mail: greeleyhfh@yahoo.com
web site: www.greeeleyhabitat.org

The Weld County Builders Association donated time and materials and rebuilt the home in time for the Landin family to close on their scheduled date and move into their new rebuilt home.

it in six weeks, so the family doesn't lose out on its closing date.' Dave Grauberger, who owns Steamway Carpets, stood up and said he'd donate and install the carpet. The plumber got up and said they'd do the plumbing. The framers said they'd do the framing. It was like a chain reaction."

Builders donate time and materials

Grauberger, president for the Weld County Builders Association, added, "All that we donated was for the people who got their house burned down. The builders are probably the most giving people of any industry I've been involved with. Whenever you ask them they say, 'Well, yeah, we'll do this.' We don't have a lot of money, but we have a lot of skills."

Fassler agreed. "It really took one meeting. Everybody who was given an opportunity to volunteer, did. I approached people and said if they wanted to donate the materials, that's great. If they didn't, we'd find a way to pay for them. It was great to see everybody step up and donate the labor and materials." The Greeley community at large even came out to help where they could — from meals to materials.

The estimated value of donated services and products for the 1,348 sq.ft., four-bedroom, two-bath home was in the neighborhood of $80,000. Just 60 days later, the project was completed in time for the subdivision's October 1 dedication, and the Landins moved into their new home. "Normally, this would have set us back several months," said Jim Vetting, president of the Greeley Area Habitat. "But thanks to the Weld County builders, we had the home completed right on schedule."

> "Normally, this would have set us back several months. But thanks to the Weld County builders, we had the home completed right on schedule."
>
> — Jim Vetting, president
> Greeley Area Habitat

"I didn't realize the strength in the builder's organization," Vetting remarked. "I was impressed with an organization that could do the job we needed them to do — without pay — and to do it seemingly effortlessly, because they have the talent and skills."

More good has come from the tragedy, too. John Fassler now sits on the Construction Committee for Habitat. "We're not there for ourselves; we're there to help where we can in the community," commented Fassler. "Many of us who live in Weld County know that a lot of our success is not just what we do ourselves, but where we are. We're in this high-growth area and we wouldn't be so lucky with our businesses. This was just a great opportunity for us to give back."