

## Two families receive dream home

By Natasha Carter  
Staff writer

FELLSMERE - First was the foundation, then up went the walls, and moments after was the roof.

This sequence of events is not the assembly of a Barbie dream house, but the collaborative effort of Indian River County Health Department, Regatta Construction of Vero Beach and tons of dedicated volunteers to build two homes in a day for low-income families.

Last week, what was witnessed on State Street had never been seen before.

Painters slapped on blue and green paint simultaneously to the exterior of the homes and roofers attentively placed shingles for Martha Rainey, 63 and Pamela Jefferson, 40.

The two women were definitely in need.

"I was living in poor conditions," Mrs. Jefferson said. "I thought they were playing when they told me the house would be done in a day."

Mrs. Jefferson describes the event as a blessing that was a long time coming. Her old home was built in a week with a grant from the city, but with three hurricanes, it had seen better days, she said.

Her neighbor, Mrs. Rainey, was astonished by the builders' speed.

"It's unbelievable. When I came this morning they were pushing up the sides and then I saw the roof," she said.

Mrs. Rainey also had a home that was fast becoming unfit to live in. She is battling colon cancer and raising her grandson.

The Indian River County Health Department's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence Program started in early August, addressing the problems of the predominantly black neighborhood, and by July had demolished the homes of both families.

The effort, Extreme Home Challenge, was solely due to the tenacity and selfless love from various donors in the community.

Joe Telese of Regatta Construction signed on as the main contractor and a group of subcontractors weren't far behind.

Mike Lally of Upstate Builders has participated in projects like this in St. Lucie County. When he heard about it he called and asked how he could help.

"Things like this motivate us. These two people were in desperate need and are well deserving. So we had to step up to the plate," Mr. Lally said.

Julianne Price, of the Indian River County Health Department and Teddy Floyd of the Indian River County Sheriff's Office stuck to the project like others in the past.



"We committed to doing Pam's house, but Sara (Savage, the Fellsmere mayor) wasn't happy and thought we should look at Martha's home as well," Mrs. Price said.

By 11 a.m. the project was propelling full speed ahead with the delivery of doors, floor tiles and other donated items valued at \$260,000.

Mrs. Rainey quickly moved through the crowd, enticing volunteers with her homemade bean pie.

"I haven't seen so many people here since the rodeo," she said.

The community's support weighed heavily in pulling the event off.

Alyson Childress and several other local residents came in and asked restaurants and clubs to donate food to feed the volunteers from sun up to sun down.

Their efforts resulted in a feast fit for southern royalty.

Pulled pork, beans, rice, chicken, cornbread and much much more was available to keep everyone's motor running.

"It feels like Christmas," said Annie Mae Brown, a Fellsmere resident, who patiently cooked fried chicken alongside her husband.

"I couldn't sleep. I was up at 3 a.m. The walls went up at 6 a.m. and we've been pushing ever since."

Mrs. Brown said she believed the day was a testament of unity.

"Us coming together for a common cause shows what we can do," she said.

"This is what police work is all about being able to help out with things like this. When you compare yesterday to today it's really amazing. The best part is, it was a collaborative effort from the community," Deputy Floyd said. "This is the best Saturday ever."

The city's mayor felt the same.

"The most important thing is seeing what we can accomplish if we work together.

Because today we have people here from all over the county. Its unbelievable," Mayor Savage said.

As the doors of the two \$130,000, three bedroom and two bathroom homes went on anticipation grew for the soon-to-be tenants.

"I'm glad I don't have to wake up so early to catch the bus," said Hakeem Rainey, who is happy about his grandmother's home being closer to the bus stop. He will move in with his grandmother and is glad to see her happy.

"She feels good because she kept trying to find help," he said.

But neighbor Veronica Clark, Mrs. Jefferson's daughter 9-year-old is excited for other reasons.

"I'm happy that's it. I'm ready to have a slumber party," she said.

While builders and volunteers tied up all the loose ends, Mrs. Rainey gave much credit to her guardian angels.

"I don't talk about my guardian angels because I want to keep 'em," she said with a smile.

For more information about the results of the Extreme Home Challenge, go to [www.everydreamhasaprice.com](http://www.everydreamhasaprice.com).