



Timberpeg employees work on a new post-and-beam house in Norwich being built by Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity.

(Valley News — Jason Johns)

Valley Family Gets a 'Peg' Up

W. Lebanon Firm Donates to Habitat for Humanity House

By Mark Davis

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Norwich -- Even before he knew all the details, Brian Sanville thought it was the nicest thing anyone had ever done for him.

In May, Sanville was told that his family -- his fiancé and the three children they raise inside a Lebanon apartment -- had been selected by Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity to receive a brand-new home in Norwich.

But when he went to the groundbreaking ceremony, Sanville learned he would not be moving into an ordinary home, but a house with a timber frame and pegs, material usually reserved for the well-to-do.

“It's overwhelming,” Sanville, 41, said in a recent interview. “One day I'm in an apartment and the next day I'm building a house. This is the greatest opportunity anybody has ever given me. I wish there was something I could do for them.”

For the past week, employees from Timberpeg, which specializes in timber framing and is headquartered in West Lebanon, have been busy erecting the Sanville's new home on Starlake Lane. The company donated the frame and the design work.

It is the first time Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity has built a timber-frame home, director Don Derrick said. The organization, founded in 1986, will complete its 24th home this summer, Derrick said, and the local group usually builds traditional two-story Cape-style homes.

“For us, it's totally unusual,” Derrick said. “It's an offer we couldn't refuse.”

The seeds of Timberpeg's involvement were planted last summer, when Nate Neroni, a son of company President and Chief Operating Officer Richard Neroni, volunteered on a Habitat for Humanity project in Lyme. One day, Richard Neroni visited the work site.

“I thought about it and said, ‘Timberpeg should be involved in something like this,’” said Neroni, a Hanover resident.

Initially, Neroni considered simply donating the timber frame, which runs about \$250,000. But then he decided his company, having built lodges, golf clubs and offices across the country, could do more.

“I said, ‘We've got to get involved on a bigger scale,’” Neroni said.

Usually, Timberpeg's involvement with a project stops when the company delivers the frame to builders. But for Sanville's home, the company decided to provide the labor, too.

“Our shop guys don't usually get out on job sites,” Neroni said. “It's rewarding for them.”

Some of Timberpeg's contractors and suppliers donated siding and other material. The land was donated by Twin Pines Housing Trust, the non-profit that created Starlake Village in the early 1990s in hopes of bringing working-class families to one of the wealthiest communities in Vermont.

Sanville and his wife Marie Disdier are raising three children, Lisa, 8 and Cindy, 6, and one-year-old Niko, on a tight budget. Sanville is the night maintenance man at the Powerhouse Mall in West Lebanon, and Disdier scoops ice cream at Ben & Jerry's in Hanover.

“It's hard and it's getting harder,” Sanville said. “We pay rent, put food on the table, diapers for Niko, gas to get back and forth to work, and that's it. No other luxuries.”

The family will not have to pay full town taxes on their new home. If they decide to sell, they must do so through Twin Pines Housing Trust, which will keep the home at an “affordable” level for another family, and not sell it for full market value.

Therefore Sanville and his family would not recover the full market value of the home, and property tax bills will reflect the lesser resale value, Twin Pines Housing Trust Executive Director Bruce Pacht said.

Now, they plan to be in their new home by Christmas. The girls are already talking about what color they will paint their rooms. Sanville talks excitedly about putting in a playground in their yard, and being able to host family gatherings in comfort.

Habitat for Humanity requires home recipients to put in 500 hours of “sweat equity” into the project, so Sanville has been working recent days at the site before heading into work for his night shift at the mall.

It's a small price to pay, he said.

“I told them I'll build three houses,” Sanville said. “You're giving me the opportunity to own my own home. I don't know how to repay you.”