

Next Door Neighbors

Canisius Helps Buffalo Family Realize Dream of Home Ownership in Historic Hamlin Park Community



The Burton Family (l-r): Front row: Joi and Naomi. Second row: Simone and Jabot. Third row: Regina and David.



Thanks to Canisius College, a Buffalo family will realize their dream of home ownership. In early February, the college transferred ownership of a house and lot at 70-72 Eastwood Place to Habitat for Humanity-Buffalo. Now, Habitat work crews, in conjunction with the Canisius Chapter of Habitat for Humanity, are renovating the home for David and Regina Burton and their four children.

"Canisius College believes very strongly that it needs to do everything possible to encourage home ownership in the neighborhoods immediately around the college," said Canisius President Rev. Vincent M. Cooke, S.J. "More owner-occupied homes will mean a stronger, more stable neighborhood with a higher quality of life for people who wish to live here."

"It is a great program," added David Burton, who is grateful to Canisius and Habitat for donating the property, which is located within the Hamlin Park

historic preservation district. "It gives people the opportunity to own their own homes and also help out."

Under Habitat's guidelines, the Burtons must invest 500 hours of labor into a combination of the Eastwood Place residence and other Habitat projects. To date, David and Regina Burton have invested more than 350 hours of 'sweat equity.' Renovation began in February and is expected to be completed this summer, according to the project manager.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for Habitat and Canisius to collaborate on a project that will enhance the Hamlin Park neighborhood and provide decent housing to a Habitat family," said David K. Floyd, chair of Habitat's site selection committee. "We return a home to single family ownership and Canisius volunteers will see the fruits of their labors every day."

The 70 and 72 Eastwood properties were acquired by Canisius in October 1986 and June 1987, respectively, and had been used for student housing until December 2004 when the college took the property off-line. The house then served as a field construction office for crews working on the college's recently completed Eastwood Residence Hall, located directly across the street.

"As we considered our options with this property, it became clear that with the completion of our residence hall projects on campus, we no longer needed it for student housing," said Canisius Vice President for College Relations **John J. Hurley '78**. "We were not interested in simply putting the house on the market and allowing an absentee landlord to acquire the property."

The Habitat project is the second significant investment the college has made in its community in recent years. In 2002, Canisius introduced its Employer Assisted Housing Program, which offers incentives in the form of forgivable loans to Canisius employees who purchase homes in the neighborhoods around the college. Enhanced incentives are available for employees who choose to buy in the neighborhoods closest to the college, including Hamlin Park. Buyers in those neighborhoods are eligible for forgivable loans

Photo, left – Clay Dolatowski '07 assists in the remodeling effort by removing nails from the previous flooring upstairs. Photo, right – 70 Eastwood Place: The future home of the Burton Family. Exterior renovations will begin once the inside is near completion.



Daniel Theal '08, co-president of the Canisius Chapter of Habitat for Humanity, and David Burton measure and trim insulation for one of the four bedrooms.

equal to 10 percent of the purchase price of the home up to a maximum of \$7,000. The incentives can be used for down payments, closing costs or initial repairs.

Since the program was introduced, 12 Canisius employees have purchased homes in the targeted neighborhoods but no purchases have been made in Hamlin Park. The first in Buffalo, the program has also served as the model for other programs in the area.

"It has become clear that we will need to do more to encourage buyers to consider Hamlin Park," said Hurley, who noted that Canisius owns 12 homes in the neighborhood bounded by Main Street and East Delavan Avenue and Humboldt Parkway and Jefferson Avenue. "Canisius will explore several initiatives to promote home ownership in the area around the college with the Hamlin Park Association and other parties in the months ahead."

Possible initiatives include expansion of the college's EAH program and additional collaborations with Habitat-Buffalo to renovate houses in the neighborhood.

For the Burton family, the opportunity will provide them with a home they might never have had, and neighbors they might never have known.

"We were hoping and praying that we would get a house near Delaware Park," said David Burton. "My wife likes to walk and we look forward to walking around the neighborhood. We can't wait to move in."

