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## California



NARESHIMAH OSEI/ Habitat-LA

Volunteers from Los Angeles firms partner with Habitat for Humanity's skilled laborers, crew leaders, and staff to build a home for a low-income family in South Los Angeles. Buildable Hours Inc. coordinates the housing projects.

## Law Firms Pitch in Sweat, Money to Build Home

By Tina Spee

Daily Journal Staff Writer

Saturday morning, a group of five dozen Los Angeles lawyers, summer associates, law-firm personnel and Habitat for Humanity staff and volunteers gathered in South Los Angeles to raise the first wall of what will one day be a two-story, three-bedroom home for a low-income family of four.

Construction of the home will be made possible by \$107,500 in donations made by

21 law firms in Los Angeles, organized under a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group called Buildable Hours Inc.

The organization coordinates contributions and volunteer activities from law firms nationwide, partnering with local Habitat for Humanity offices to build and renovate affordable housing for qualified low-income families.

Roger S. Goldman, a partner at Latham & Watkins' Washington, D.C., office, founded the organization last year with Scott Michel, a partner at Washington,

D.C.'s Caplin & Drysdale.

Buildable Hours completed its first project, a home in Washington, D.C., last summer. This year, in addition to the South Los Angeles project, the organization is building two other homes, one in Washington, D.C., and one in New York.

Buildable Hours also plans to start construction on a smaller project in San Diego this year.

Manny Abascal, a partner at Latham & Watkins' Los Angeles headquarters, says the firm had no problem convincing other

local law firms to donate time and money to the project.

"The response from the law firms has been tremendous," Abascal said. "I thought it would be difficult to organize this effort, but after one e-mail and a handful of phone calls, 21 law firms jumped on board with incredible enthusiasm."

After holding a meeting of local law-firm leaders this spring, Latham & Watkins had all the support it needed to pursue the project. Abascal approached the local Habitat for Humanity chapter and offered to sponsor a construction project.

"To have 21 of the largest law firms in the city approach you to make a donation, especially during tough economic times ... it was incredible," said E. Felicia Brannon, chairwoman of Habitat for Humanity in Los Angeles.

Each firm agreed to donate \$5,000 to the project, with the exception of O'Melveny & Myers, which donated \$7,500. Other firms involved with the project include Munger, Tolles & Olson;

Allen Matkins Leck Gamble & Mallory; Loeb & Loeb; Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp; Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman Machtinger & Kinsella; and Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher.

Robert A. Miller Jr., chairman of Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker's Los Angeles office, said his firm took part in the project because it seemed like "such a concrete demonstration of something good for the community."

"It's a great opportunity for camaraderie among the lawyers and the summer associates in the firm," Miller added.

Volunteers from the firms will help with construction of the home, working alongside Habitat for Humanity's skilled laborers, crew leaders, staff and volunteers.

Joseph Wong, a summer associate at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld in Los Angeles, is excited about doing some hands-on work for the project, even though he never has been involved with construction before.

"I can't even put together Ikea furniture," Wong joked. "Pray for me."

The home's new owners, Jaime and Maricela Guzman, also will help with construction of the home. The couple has two children, Abraham, 13, and Andrea, 11.

To qualify for the home, the family had to have an annual income of less than 50 percent of Los Angeles County's median income level. For a family of four, the median is \$56,000.

In addition to living in substandard or overcrowded residencies, families also have to volunteer hundreds of hours of "sweat equity," or hours worked on Habitat projects, before qualifying for a home.

After a three-year application process, the Guzmans, who reside in Bell Gardens, were approved to receive a 0 percent mortgage on the house, on which they'll be required to make a 1 percent down payment.

The first-time homeowners are thrilled about the prospect of having a place to call their own. The home will be dedicated at a ceremony Aug. 2.

"My daughter already knows what color she wants her room painted," Jaime Guzman said. "Yellow."