

Story of how Habitat changed lives wins honor

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Merita James never imagined she'd be a homeowner.

Her daughter, Charisse James, never imagined she'd win an international essay contest. Both were wrong.

Merita James, a single mother of two, completed the requirements of Habitat for Humanity and became the proud owner of her own home in 2000. Daughter Charisse, then almost 13, remembers what an exciting and emotional experience it was for her family to move into their new Habitat home.

"We were all crying," James, now a senior and double major at N.C. State University, said of the dedication ceremony. "I remember my mother saying she never thought she'd have her own home; to hear her say that ... makes it even more important."

James jotted her thoughts down about the program and walked away with first place in the 19-25 age division of the Habitat for Humanity's Homeowners Youth Essay Contest.

James says it was her mother who received a letter about the contest and urged her to participate.

"She felt that I should enter because I've always been pretty good at writing," she commented. "I wanted to win, but I don't think that was the biggest thing on my brain."

James received word last month that she had won.

"I didn't really scream out, but it all bubbling inside of me," she said. "I was really smiling and excited."

More than 1700 affiliates

make up the international organization, helping countless families around the globe to achieve the dream of homeownership.

"I am extremely proud of (Charisse) and her family," commented Hilda Moore, director of Family Services for Habitat-Forsyth. "They have always been very ambitious."

For Charisse, making the transition to a Habitat home meant a room all to herself after sharing a space with brother Sherod, seven years her senior, since birth.

"I guess when I was little, it probably wasn't a big deal, but as I got older, I wanted my own space," she related. "There was really no private place for either one of us (in our previous home)."

Habitat for Humanity has irrevocably changed her life, James says. Watching her mother struggle to achieve the dream the organization would eventually afford her was especially empowering, she added.

"If you believe it, you can achieve it - that's what I think I've learned from her," James remarked. "It's not like working on this home was the only thing she had to do. She still had her regular job and taking care of us. I'm sure she was tired, but she never complained."

Even when she went away to school, James says she carried the lessons her mother and Habitat had taught her. She participates in an annual campus wide "Shack-a-thon," where students sleep in shacks to raise money for the local affiliate, and volunteers whenever she can.

"I don't take it lightly that we were able to receive a

home," she said. "Now that we're in it and we've been living our lives, I haven't forgotten to give back. Every opportunity to do something

for someone else is a joy to me."

Winning the contest was another notch on her belt for the psychology / sociology

major, who allocated her \$500 winnings for Habitat-Forsyth, in hopes that she might help another bright young girl like herself become the recipient

of her own room.

"It feels good to share my story," she said with a grin. "I'm proud to be able to say that I won."

BestHealth[®] Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

August 2008 Events

Events are held at BestHealth in Hanes Mall or other locations, as noted.

☎ = registration required. Call Health On-Call[®] at 336-716-2255 or visit www.besthealth.com.

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1 FRI - The Environment: Health vs. Hazard

11:30 a.m. Dr. Henderson McGinnis of WFUBMC Emergency Medicine and the Appalachian Center for Wilderness Medicine offers tips and remedies for things such as burns, heat exhaustion, bites and drowning. ☎

5 TUE - Technology for the 21st Century Family

10:30 a.m. Representatives from Computer Tree demonstrate and instruct senior adults in the successful use and application of the Internet, personal digital assistants, MP3 players and other devices. ☎

5 TUE - Wok 'n' Roll 101

6 to 7:30 p.m. Using a wok to make healthy, tasty meals is easier than you think! Chef Ernest Knight shares recipes and samples with an Asian flare. ☎

7 THU - The Healing Touch

6 p.m. Deborah Larrimore, RN, of the WFUBMC Complementary and Integrative Medicine Program presents 'Healing Touch,' an energy-based therapy that promotes health and healing. Learn how it supplements traditional medical treatments. ☎

8 FRI - Look Good, Feel Better

11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Women undergoing cancer treatment learn ways to enhance their appearance and feel better about themselves. Receive a make-up kit valued at over \$150 for participating. Sponsored by the American Cancer Society. ☎

11 MON - Dispelling the Dyslexia Myths

6 p.m. Dyslexia affects reading and writing. WFUBMC neuropsychologist Dr. Cecile Naylor explains its origin, symptoms and treatments for all ages. ☎

12 TUE - Belly Dancing

6 p.m. Learn a fun way to get in shape with instructor Paula Stump. Dress comfortably to participate. ☎

13 WED - Knee Pain

2:30 p.m. Learn the causes of and treatments for knee pain from chief physician's assistant Frank Caruso of WFUBMC Orthopaedic Surgery. ☎

13 WED - How to Deal with Difficult People

4 p.m. Dr. Laurel Link of WFUBMC pastoral counseling presents strategies for how to best handle people who are overbearing or intimidating in ways that reduce stress and produce good outcomes. ☎

14 THU - Hair Restoration

6 p.m. WFUBMC otolaryngologist Dr. Neal Goldman discusses the process and advances in modern hair restoration procedures. ☎

15 FRI - Healthy Lunch, Happy Child

12 to 1:30 p.m. A healthy midday meal can be the secret to a productive school day for kids of all ages. ☎

Chef Nikki Miller-Ka shares ideas for unique and simple lunch box favorites. ☎

19 TUE - Mature Driver Safety Program

12 to 4 p.m. Drivers ages 50+ learn ways to improve driving skills and avoid car crashes in this 8-hour classroom-based course sponsored by AARP and led by WFUBMC nurse Donna Joyner. Continues Wed., 8/20, 12-4 pm. \$10 per person for the two-day course. ☎

21 THU - Dress Up Your Salads

5:15 to 6:45 p.m. The perfect way to top off a summery salad is with a zesty dressing. Barry Moody shares his personal secrets for flavorful salads. Recipes and samples provided. ☎

22 FRI - Are Your Muscles Weak?

4 p.m. Myasthenia gravis is a neuromuscular disorder characterized by variable weakness of voluntary muscles, which often improves with rest and worsens with activity. WFUBMC neurologist Dr. James Caress explains the potential causes as well as diagnosis and treatment. ☎

23 SAT - Love to Landscape

11:30 a.m. Join Marcia Wood, Allied ASID and APLD, to learn the most important fall gardening chores for maintaining an attractive landscape around your home. ☎

23 SAT - Eat, Drink, and Be Encouraged!

1:30 p.m. Jackie Stanley shares tools and strategies to help you turn the page on despair, defeat and discouragement so you can begin reshaping your life. ☎

25 MON - Lose Weight with the Lap-Band[®] System

6 p.m. WFUBMC surgeon Dr. Adolfo Fernandez explains the Lap-Band[®] System, which closes off a large portion of the stomach in an effort to lessen fat and calorie consumption. Learn about the risks and benefits of this alternative to gastric bypass. ☎

26 TUE - Voice and Swallowing Disorders

11:30 a.m. Certain factors can affect the sound of your voice, how smoothly food passes down your throat, or both. WFUBMC otolaryngologist Dr. Carter Wright explains these factors, describes symptoms and provides an overview of treatments. ☎

26 TUE - Fibroid Facts

6 p.m. Uterine fibroids can cause pain in women of all ages and can affect reproduction if not properly treated. Dr. Tamer Yalcinkaya of WFUBMC Reproductive Medicine explains the symptoms, diagnosis and treatments. ☎

27 WED - Yoga for Relaxation

12 p.m. Join certified instructor Valerie Kiser of Sunrise Yoga for an interactive session that shows you how yoga can help you relax. ☎

27 WED - Faith in Health and Healing

3 p.m. Mark Jensen of WFUBMC Chaplaincy and Pastoral Education discusses the role of spirituality in physical and emotional healing, as well as the significance of prayer and church support. ☎

28 THU - Advance Directives

1 p.m. Learn how advance directives such as a living will can ensure your wishes will be met. Learn the terminology and procedures and have documents notarized free of charge. ☎

28 THU - Rebuilding a Broken Spine

6 p.m. Thanks to recent medical advances, patients suffering from degenerative disc disease are finding many surgical alternatives. Artificial disc surgery provides patients relief from neck pain and allows them to resume a normal lifestyle. WFUBMC neurosurgeon Dr. Thomas Sweasey presents the procedure, risks and benefits associated with artificial cervical discs. ☎

Other Locations

4 MON - Triathlon 101: Preparing Your Mind and Your Body

5:45 to 6:45 p.m.; 7 to 8 p.m. At 5:45 p.m., join BestHealth registered dietitian Dayle Fuentes for recipes, samples and meal ideas to prepare your body for the endurance needed to compete in a triathlon. At 7 p.m., join Emily and Keith Davis of Fleet Feet Sports to learn triathlon basics: the lingo, race logistics and how to get started. *Register for one or both sessions. Held at the new Gateway YWCA, 1300 S. Main St., Winston-Salem. ☎

20 WED - Healthy Foods for Kids

11 a.m. or 6 p.m. BestHealth registered dietitian Dayle Fuentes discusses nutritious snacks, ideas for creative and healthy lunches and easy weeknight dinners the whole family will love. Held at Whole Foods Market[®], Miller St., Winston-Salem. Space limited; registration required. ☎



Photo by Charlie Gilbert

Merita James' family's dreams came true.

Memorial

from page A2

other things on that list," said Tracie Washington, a local attorney who advocates for affordable housing, health care and other needs in the city. "You kind of presume it's going to get done. You just never think in advance who is going to get it done."

Minyard's office shouldered the memorial project after organizing some 900 Katrina-related autopsies, and helping investigate 3,000 missing person's reports. The city coroner has now become a repository for one of the worst per-capita murder rates in the country, with 209 killed in 2007 and 95 killed so far this year.

Coroner psychologist Dr. Jeffrey Rouse, whose duty is to help families cope with death, designed a Katrina tribute that will be shaped like a satellite image of the hurricane.

A canopy of trees will lead visitors to the structure, where they can follow circular patterns of plaque-filled walls bearing the names of the deceased. On either side, mausoleums for the unclaimed will stand, the bodies able to be moved if family members surface to bury them on a private plot. In the eye of the storm

will be a bronze statue of two angels rescuing a fleur-de-lis, the city symbol.

It will sit on a piece of land donated by Louisiana State University known as the Charity Hospital Cemetery. The grounds there contain the unmarked graves of centuries of the city's poorest. If remains are discovered during topsoil removal, work will be stopped while an onsite archaeologist documents.

Minyard is unsure how many plaques will be displayed, because defining a Katrina-related fatality carries legal ramifications, affects life insurance policies and public aid. Some drowned, some died from exposure, and others died weeks later from apparent physical stress during the evacuation. State health department statistics show blacks were 53 percent of fatalities and whites were 39 percent - many of them over the age of 65.

There were no completion dates set for each stage of construction on a memorial to them. Two days after The Associated Press asked about its status, LSU signed off on a city permit to allow topsoil clearing at an undetermined date. Workers later drove a pattern of stakes into the ground and drew an outline with fluorescent paint. For now, the only place the monument exists is in a Web site rendering.



Minyard

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Unless otherwise stated, BestHealth programs are for adults; no children under age 12, please.



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