

USASMA helps make dreams come true

Academy students volunteer for Habitat for Humanity

MASTER SGT. CAMERON PORTER
USASMA Class 58 Public Affairs

After living in their mobile home for 12 years, the small apartment was a welcome, warm substitute for the family of five. But then tragedy struck. The apartment flooded, and the Sigala family was forced into a relative's garage.

Still, they held onto their dream – a dream to one day have a home they could call their own.

More than 35 students from the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Class 58 are helping make the Sigala family's dream come true. By joining forces with Habitat for Humanity of El Paso, the Soldiers are finishing a brand new home for the family in El Paso's Desert Palms subdivision.

Muriel Hall, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of El Paso, said her office is historically responsible for building one or two homes in the El Paso area each year. She said volunteers from USASMA, just one or two the first year, have grown to more than 30 within the past five years.

With a goal to build five homes in El Paso this year, Habitat for Humanity, with the help of USASMA, is taking on the most challenging construction year since 1989, Hall said.

"The academy brings skilled, committed leadership that only strengthens the overall presence of our organization," Hall said. "I really believe we can achieve anything with the academy's help."

Jesus Sigala often works side-by-side and hand-in-hand with the USASMA volunteers. His home is taking shape very quickly and he's very grateful, he said.

"These Soldiers fight for our freedom and well-being and make us safe here in the United States. They are American heroes," Sigala said. "But out here, as they work on my family's beautiful new home, they are my personal heroes. It's a wonderful dream come true for me and my family.

"They are building a home for my family here, and I know God will build a home for them in heaven," Sigala added.

Master Sgt. John Eastburn and Sgt. Maj. Robert Stanley are students with

USASMA's Sergeants Major Course Class 58, and they are both volunteer members with the academy's Habitat for Humanity committee.

Eastburn has been out to the construction site, working on the Sigala family's new home, three times. Stanley, the committee's chairperson, has been out to the site several times.

"When I first came out here, it was just a slab of concrete and a truck full of lumber," said Eastburn. "Within the first day, we had all the walls up. And in just a couple of weeks, I'm surprised at how much we've gotten done here."

Stanley, a licensed home-building contractor in Tennessee and a National Guardsman there, said he hopes the academy students can complete two more homes by the end of this year.

"We hope to have two homes completely finished by Christmas – ready to move in," Stanley said. "And we hope to finish a total of six homes by [our class] graduation."

"I like the idea of people helping people out," said Eastburn. "It shows that we care about the community and those people who are in need."

Stanley, Eastburn and the other USASMA Habitat for Humanity volunteers said they believe their time is very well spent.

"I love this kind of stuff – getting my hands dirty and building something," Eastburn said. "I can definitely see the fruition of our labor."

"We've met the family who'll be living in this home," Stanley said. "They are very supportive of the work we are doing. The father, the oldest daughter and the oldest son have been out here several times helping."

To date, Habitat for Humanity of El Paso has constructed and mortgaged 38 homes at zero percent interest. Through volunteer labor and monetary and material donations, Habitat for Humanity of El Paso builds and renovates simple, decent, affordable homes.

For more information on Habitat for Humanity of El Paso, or to find out how to volunteer time, money, or material to the organization, call 755-6633.



PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. CAMERON PORTER

As a flurry of sawdust kicks up into his face, Master Sgt. Billy Thompson, a USASMA Class 58 student, rips into a slab of roof sheathing with an electric skill saw.

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Students from USASMA Class 58 started building their first Habitat for Humanity home three weeks ago. Expected to be completed by Christmas, this home will soon belong to a family of five whose home was recently destroyed by a flood.



Sgt. Maj. Ricardo Weems, a USASMA Class 58 student and Habitat for Humanity volunteer, nails in hurricane hangers to secure roof trusses to the walls of the home.