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Volunteers build 25 houses in two days

Homes of Hope celebrates 25 years of helping 'poorest of the poor'

By [Phil Diehl](#) 8:46 P.M. MAY 23, 2015

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Cipriano Morfin Ramos and Eli Sarai Morfin Ramos enter their new home with their two children (left) Elizer Gabriel Morfin Ramos, 6, and (right) Eli Morfin Ramos, 11. Photo by Misael Virgen/UT San Diego/Copyright 2015 San Diego Union-Tribune, LLC — Misael Virgen

ROSARITO BEACH — Cipriano Morfin-Ramos moved his wife and their two young children, soon to be three, out of their one-room, dirt-floored hut Saturday and into their new house on a concrete slab with two bedrooms, a

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kitchen and a bathroom.

Before he did, he thanked the group of about 20 volunteers, some from as far as Canada, for spending their Memorial Day weekend building his new home, which is right beside his old one.

“Wherever you come from, tell them there is a family here that really values what you do,” he told the volunteers in Spanish, as the green paint was drying on the door frame of his new abode.

More than 500 volunteers from across the United States and several other countries spent the weekend helping the San Diego-based nonprofit **Homes of Hope** celebrate its 25th anniversary by building 25 small houses for 25 Mexican families from Tijuana to Ensenada.

Homes of Hope, an interdenominational faith-based charity, has built more than 5,000 houses in 19 countries since it began in 1990, said founder Sean Lambert. Most of the houses, about 4,000 of them, were built just below the border in Baja California.



HOMES OF HOPE

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“We are extremely spiritual,” Lambert said. “But that’s not a qualification for getting a house.”

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The recipients must have a family, must own the land the house is built on, and must have a job, he said. And they must help build their own house.

The structures are wired for electricity and plumbed for running water and sewers, but the utilities are not provided. Most of the owners eventually get electricity, which costs them about \$350 to hook up, Lambert said, but few can afford to get running water and plumbing.

Homes of Hope helps the “poorest of the poor,” he said. The organization works to make people self-sufficient and takes time to find families who need a hand, not a handout.

“You have to have the right giving formula,” Lambert said. “If you don’t have the right giving formula, you end up hurting people.”

Apparently the formula works, he said, because a survey of 400 homes the group built shows more than 90 percent are still owned and occupied by the original families after 10 years.

To help celebrate the 25th anniversary, Lambert’s son-in-law, Guy East, arranged to have 20 Olympic athletes, many of them medal winners, help build houses.

The athletes were all working together on a different house a few blocks away from the Morfin-Ramos family’s place.

East, a professional cyclist and former Olympic contender himself, has helped build as many as 30 houses. He said he initially was moved to join the effort because of the extreme poverty he saw when racing in Mexico.

The athletes painting and hammering nails Saturday included USA’s 2000 Games gold medal diver Laura Wilkinson, 2012 USA cycling silver medalist Erica Wu, and Winston Watts, the famed Jamaican bobsledder from four straight Olympiads beginning in 1994.

“It’s a great bunch of people to work with,” said Watts, who now lives and trains in Wyoming. “I hope to do this more.”

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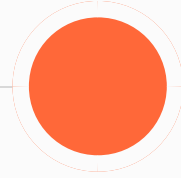
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