

ELK RAPIDS NEWS

December 2
2021

Volume XVI
Issue No. 28
75¢

Home for the holidays

BY BARB MOSHER,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Peyton Ruppel has been waiting to add a bearded dragon to his life since his 11th birthday last January. He has the tank and all the necessary accessories to create a welcoming home for a pet lizard. He even has a gift card to purchase the reptile. All Peyton's been waiting on is his own home with his own bedroom.

that builds homes around the world in partnership with families in need of an affordable, decent place to live, adding to the foundation of strong and stable communities. Partner families work alongside local volunteers in the construction process and pay an affordable mortgage on the completed house.

The novelty of personal space for her and her

home off and on for the last ten years. Every time she found a place of their own, something happened to send them back — the rent for an income-based apartment sky-rocketed; a mobile home rented from an elderly couple was sold when they both died. The instability of rental options and the seeming impossibility of qualifying for a traditional mortgage weighed on the young mom's heart and mind.

"It's been tough, especially with the kids," Amanda said. "I love my parents to death, and I'm super thankful for them, but as an adult with my own children, you just want to be out on your own."

Although always willing to help her daughter and grandsons, it was Amanda's mother who encouraged her to attend a Habitat for Humanity informational seminar in January 2020. Assuming that her income would be too high to qualify for the program's assistance — she manages a Verizon store in Traverse City — Amanda sat on the application for three months until deciding she would never know unless she turned it in. She was surprised to hear back quickly and encouraged when additional information was requested.

"A month and a half later, they called and said I was approved," Amanda said. "I

ran into the kitchen and told my mom. Then I told the boys, 'We're going to have our own place.'"

The Coronavirus pandemic didn't halt the process, but Amanda says it did slow things down dramatically. "It was one delay after another," she said. "Sometimes it was materials; I waited months for a garage door. Sometimes it was just the fact that we couldn't have as many people working together on the site at the same time. And inspections took

continued on page 2



Amanda Wolschon with her sons, Spencer and Peyton, in the kitchen of their new home.
Photo by Barb Mosher



Amanda Wolschon and her sons, Spencer and Peyton, cut the ribbon on their new home, watched by Erin Paull, Habitat for Humanity Homeowner Services Manager. Courtesy photo

That final hurdle was removed two weeks ago when his mother, Amanda Wolschon, signed the mortgage papers on a Habitat for Humanity-Grand Traverse Region home off Vinton Road in Williamsburg. The family, including 10-year-old Spencer, moved in the next day.

"He's already asked me twice about setting the tank up," Amanda said of Peyton's persistent determination.

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit organization

sons, the ability to settle into daily routines, and the anticipation of establishing family traditions had Amanda beaming with joy even as she sat amidst the jumble of cleaning supplies, partially unpacked boxes, and miscellaneous decor awaiting permanent placement in her new home.

"Routine will be huge," the single mom said. "Everyone thrives on routine, and we just haven't had much of that in a long time."

Amanda and the boys have shared her parents'

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lot longer because they were all backed up, too.”

But over the next 12 months, the stick-built, three-bedroom, one-bathroom home with vinyl siding took shape. Amanda was responsible for 275 hours of “sweat equity” that Habitat requires of its partners, including 40 hours that can be contributed by friends and family. Toward that goal, she worked at the organization’s ReStore



Amanda Wolschon, her fiancé, Adam, and her sons, Spencer and Peyton. Courtesy photo

(a nonprofit home improvement store and donation center in Traverse City), assisted with an estate sale fund raiser, helped paint the interior of a neighboring Habitat home, and learned how to nail the walls of her own garage.

“It was hard,” she said. “As a (Verizon) store manager, I’m required to work a minimum of 40 hours a week. And I’ve had huge staffing issues, so I’ve been working six or more days a week. It was daunting, but the (Habitat) staff and volunteers made it fun. You spend a year with them, seeing them every week. You get to know them, and they get to know you and your kids.”

So when those people — and some Amanda didn’t even know — gathered last month to dedicate the home and hand her the keys to it, she found herself struggling for a way to express her gratitude. But with plans for eating Thanksgiving dinner in her own home for the first time, and eager to decorate her own front porch for Christmas, words finally made their way up from the depths of her heart.

“I’m so, so grateful for Habitat and everything they do and provide,” she said. “It’s hard to put into words. I’m excited to build traditions with my kids, and even just the day-to-day routines. This will be their home when they graduate from high school. I’m extremely thankful. It’s been a long time coming. It’s quite the blessing.”

And Peyton, well, he proudly pulled his pet store gift card from his wallet to show a visitor and remind his mom of his soon-to-be-fulfilled birthday gift. After all, what’s a new home without a bearded dragon?

In 2022, Habitat-GTR will be looking for qualified partner families for several home ownership opportunities. For more information, visit www.habitatgtr.org or call 231-941-4663.