For Immediate Release

Washington State University and Palouse Habitat for Humanity Announce Research Partnership to promote long term housing affordability

Pullman, Washington and Moscow, Idaho. (August 17, 2021) — Washington State University and Palouse Habitat for Humanity (HFH) announce a long-term partnership to study practical ways to create affordable, energy efficient housing.

A celebration will be held Thursday, September 2 at 2:00 pm at the Uniontown build site at 503 Prairie Avenue, Uniontown, Washington, as the final walls are raised in their first partnership home.

"How do our low- and moderate-income neighbors afford a home when there is a significant shortage of affordable entry level housing? " said Jennifer Wallace, executive director of Palouse Habitat for Humanity. "It's a problem nationwide, and it's a problem here in our own backyard."

Habitat for Humanity is an international housing ministry known for building affordable housing. One element of affordability is the long-term energy use of the home. The group already addresses this challenge by building homes with extended eaves, high R insulation and low E windows.

"But we know there is more we can do, and the home building industry as a whole must do more, especially with the new energy code just adopted by the State of Washington," Wallace said.

The Housing Energy Affordability Lab, or HEAL, is a partnership to test energy use across a number of Habitat built homes. The homes will be designed by WSU students and built with the help of staff and student volunteers. Researchers in WSU's School of Design and Construction will be studying construction elements in the new homes that might improve energy efficiency and affordability. WSU's Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) has also been a key actor in bringing about the partnership, working with faculty to incorporate service learning into their coursework.

"We can look critically at design, new materials, innovative methods, and find ways to make energy efficient homes affordable," said Ryan Smith, director of the School of Design and Construction who is leading the effort. "Our research could improve affordable housing not just here on the Palouse, but worldwide."

Energy costs are expected to continue to rise, so improving energy efficiency in homes is going to be increasingly important for long-term affordability and comfort, he said.

"But those energy efficient elements have to come with an affordable initial price tag, or we defeat the purpose," he added.

The first home, HEAL House 1, is the Hansen family home already under construction in Uniontown Washington. For the Hansen home, this partnership comes with an added gift, materials designed for use in an energy efficient home left over from a WSU project.

"The gift of lumber and other building materials couldn't come at a better time," said Wallace. "The cost of building materials has gone through the roof. The funds to build Habitat homes are all raised from the local community, and with back-to-back online fundraisers, our income has reduced at the same time as costs were going up. We don't currently have enough raised to be able to finish the home, but this gift gets us much closer!"

Students can register for HFH volunteer opportunities through the CCE website: https://wsu.givepulse.com/event/237619-Palouse-Habitat-for-Humanity.

In case of inclement weather, the event will be held at the Habitat for Humanity office at 306 N. Main Street in Moscow, Idaho.

For more information please contact Dr. Ryan Smith at 509-335-3066 or r.e.smith@wsu.edu or Jennifer Wallace at 208-883-8502 or director@palousehabitat.org