

## Habitat deconstructs homes for use in ReStore



Written by

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Habitat for Humanity of **Oshkosh** is known for building houses, not taking them apart.

That all changed in August when the nonprofit moved into the former Ben Franklin store at 1640 S. Koeller St., which was converted into a Habitat for Humanity ReStore. Most items for sale are things like kitchen sinks and cabinets donated by community members. The remaining 15 percent is collected during home deconstruction projects.

"We do everything but tear down the house," said John Morelli, manager of the ReStore.

Deconstructing homes is also helpful to the environment. Morelli estimates the deconstruction team has saved 102 tons of items from going into the landfill.

The homes are typically found through word of mouth. A neighbor may notice a major renovation on their block and will call Habitat, which then contacts the

homeowner for permission to do a walk-through.

Morelli assesses the property inside and out and assembles a team of volunteers to carefully peel back door frames or carry out windows. Items are then brought back to the ReStore to be cleaned up and put on the sales floor. The retail portion occupies the majority of the 18,000-square-foot building with offices and workshop and seminar space taking up the rest. Proceeds from retail sales to the public help finance future Habitat projects in the Oshkosh area.

"If we can't sell it we turn around and scrap it to make a profit. Either way it's not going in a landfill," Morelli said.

Not everything can be saved, like a three-tiered concrete fireplace recently left installed at a lakefront property deconstruction site. The home is being rebuilt from the ground up but the fireplace will remain for the wrecking crew. The manpower it would take to tear out a piece

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that large is cost prohibitive, Morelli said.

Volunteers from all walks of life are encouraged to participate but for a job like this a construction or carpentry background is useful. Delicate items such as tile or staircase railings need to be handled with care when removed from a home.

Volunteer Eric Corpon, a former construction worker from Oshkosh, revels in being on the opposite side of the operation.

"I love tearing the houses apart," Corpon said.

Corpon, who has volunteered for three deconstructions, said time passes quickly.

"My watch isn't on, the cellphone's turned off. Next thing you know the sun's going down," he said.

Andy Bongert, a carpenter in Oshkosh, appreciates the green aspect of the deconstruction process. While doing his own remodeling projects, Bongert is mindful of spare pieces and is always looking for ways to reuse wood.

"I don't like stuff going to the landfill," Bongert said. "I try to keep stuff for myself or find another way to use it on a different project."

Morelli said two deconstruction projects were completed last fall and four have been completed since April. The increase of projects correlates with the summer months, which is the time of year people

do their builds, Morelli said.

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