

Blitz Build on the

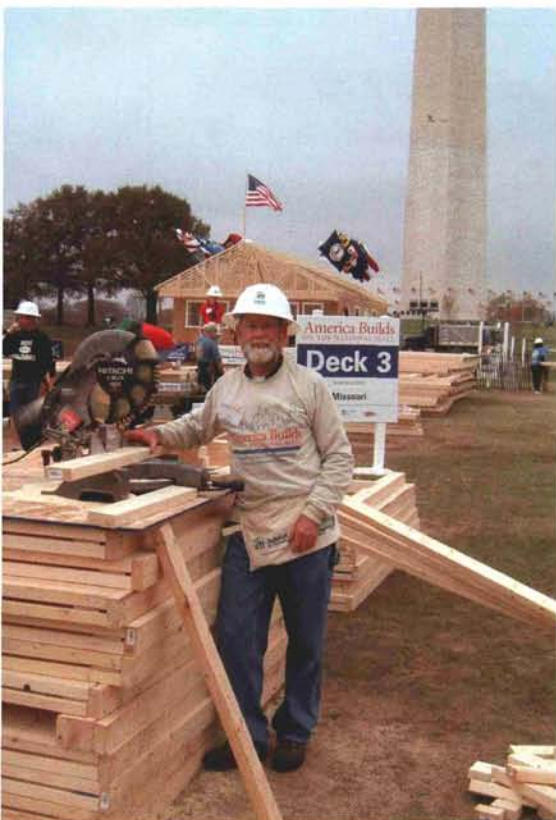
Fred Opperman has been anything but retiring in his retirement.

A past president of MAGCS and editor of On Course from 1983-1999, Fred has devoted considerable time and energy to volunteer work for the Gallatin Valley (Montana) chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Indeed, the Gallatin Valley group is a top-performing affiliate with five homes presently under construction in the Bozeman/Belgrade area. The vitality of the Gallatin Valley group, and Fred's commitment to the cause, led to a great honor for Fred. He was chosen as one of two Habitat for Humanity representatives from Montana to participate in "America Builds on the National Mall," a joint initiative of Habitat and Freddie Mac that saw the construction of 51 homes November 11-18, 2005, in Washington, D.C. These homes were designated for low-income families who were affected or displaced by last year's Gulf Coast hurricanes.

"I am very honored to have been chosen," reflected Fred after the event. "It is a pleasure to be able to help a family from the Gulf Coast who have lost everything and have to start over with their lives. It is hard for me to comprehend losing everything, your past life just being washed away. This home we built will be a huge step in the right direction for the start of a family's new life."

Here is Fred's account of the work he performed in our nation's capitol.

"America Builds on the National Mall" took place in Washington, D.C., November 11-18, 2005, and I was there. I was chosen from my affiliate to represent them and the state of Montana at this "blitz build." One other person from Billings was also chosen to go to D.C.



Fred Opperman at the Montana framing site with the Washington Monument in the background.

I arrived late in the afternoon of Monday, November 14 and was scheduled to help frame the Montana house on Tuesday, November 15 at 12:30 p.m. On Tuesday morning, I caught the shuttle bus from the hotel to the site, which was right across from the Washington Memorial on the National Mall. I arrived at the site about 6:30 a.m., had breakfast and got signed in. Then I walked the Mall to see the new World War II Memorial (it was about two blocks way), the Korean War Memorial, the Nurses War Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial. I was back at the Habitat site before 9 a.m. and asked a supervisor if he needed any help at one of that morning's four building sites. He pointed to a miter saw and said to cut up various lengths of 2 x 4s for the making of window frames. I must have cut up over a hundred 2 x 4s into four different lengths to supply the workbench making the rough window frames. Then, at 12:30 p.m., the framing of the Montana home started.

First, a little background to understand how a blitz build works, or at least how it happened at the National Mall site. A week before the construction, supervisors from Habitat affiliates around the country are chosen and volunteers came to D.C. and built four wood decks the exact size of a house about two feet above the ground. They also built workbenches around each deck for the cutting of lumber and for the assembly of the rough-size opening of doors, windows and the various other special items needed for framing a house. These items were stacked by each deck. The top and bottom plates were exactly marked where each stud, cripple, window or door was to be placed and coded on where it went on the deck. The deck had codes on each wall detailing what went there. The plates were shrink-wrapped together, so all you needed to do was carry them to the deck and find the spot they went, split them apart, place the bottom plate near the outside wall and the top plate into the house, then the studs and windows and doors were to be placed between them.

When we got to the Montana house, the deck was already laid out with all the outside walls of the framing material in the proper place. With a crew of 20-plus on hand, we started to nail everything together and stand the walls up. Each wall was then screwed to the work deck, held in place until an inte-

National Mall

rior wall was screwed into place to hold it. That went on until the house was framed. After framing, the photographer took a picture of our group with the state flag. Next our crew removed the few screws and the walls came down in sections, no longer than eight feet, and the walls being coded on the top plate were carried and packed upright in semitrailers for delivery to the Gulf Coast where the home would be completed.

Our crew went back to the deck and laid out the plates, studs, windows, doors, etc. for the house that would be built the following morning. Ours was the 28th house to be built and we set the record of two

hours, 12 minutes. The next-closest to that time for framing was two hours, 20 minutes.

Freddie Mac, the mortgage lender, sponsored the blitz build and they brought in hundreds of volunteers from their offices all across the country. This was very well-organized and meticulously planned; it had to be to build 51 houses in a week. I imagine it took a few days to dismantle the decks and workbenches and perform some type of clean-up. It was quite an experience for me and gave me some ideas that I can bring back to our group when we next do a blitz build for a house.

The next morning, Montana Senator Max Baucus invited me to have breakfast with him; we had a very good chat on Habitat and discussed some concerns related to the environment in Montana and nationally. He was easy to talk to and asked questions of my concerns. He then arranged for two of his aides to give me, and the representative from Billings and his wife, a tour of the Capitol Building—quite impressive! I then had some time to visit the new Native American Museum and the Botanic Garden before I caught my flight home.



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