

Local fund both inspires and helps community

Connections made through charitable work benefits neighbors, residents

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Volunteers raise a wall at the Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity project 'Sweet Home Swannanoa,' which prompted local builder Charlie Sparks to contribute to the Black Mountain-Swannanoa Endowment Fund. / SPECIAL TO THE BLACK MOUNTAIN NEWS/Asheville Area

Written by
[Fred McCormick](#)

With the construction of 17 homes in Beacon Village completed, the Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity will dedicate four homes at 3:30 p.m. Dec. 9. An update on the completed project will be available in The Black Mountain News during the month of December.

The idea of neighbor helping neighbor is central to the Black Mountain-Swannanoa Endowment Fund, and the charitable work that the organization has contributed to the Valley for the last 15 years.

Since 1999, the community foundation has awarded 61 grants to 34 non-profit organizations around the area and continues to inspire philanthropy in area residents to this day.

During the spring, the fund contributed nearly \$5,000 to the Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity for the construction of "Sweet Home Swannanoa House," one of 17 homes recently built by the non-profit organization in Beacon Village, according to their sponsorship coordinator, Betsy Warren.

“Habitat bought a parcel of property there, three to five years ago, where the Nolan ballfield used to be, which is a very interesting part of the Swannanoa Valley history all by itself,” Warren said. “It was the ballfield that was used by the employees that worked at Beacon, and others as well.”

The collaboration between sponsors, Habitat for Humanity and the surrounding community, gave a Swannanoa family a chance to purchase affordable housing, while also demonstrating the power of giving.

One of the volunteers that worked on the Habitat for Humanity project in Beacon Village was local builder Charlie Sparks, owner of Black Mountain Bungalow. He was immediately drawn to the sense of community that he felt and wanted to find a way to be more involved.

“That was my first time working with Habitat, and I’ve been a builder for 40 years,” Sparks said. “It is a noble objective that Habitat has, and when I saw that the Black Mountain-Swannanoa Endowment Fund contributed, I wanted to look more into it, and that drew me in.”

Sparks decided that he would make contributions to the fund for each of the homes that his company is building in Black Mountain. Which, according to the fund’s chair, Roger Hibbard, is precisely what Jim Buckner and Mike Begley envisioned when they secured the initial 200 donors upon establishing it.

“Jim (Buckner) wanted to do something for this valley,” Hibbard said. “At the time, Mike Begley was the mayor of Black Mountain, and he was familiar with the fact that so many churches and charitable organizations in the Valley were approaching the Town for funding each year as a part of the budget process. So Jim and Mike got together with the idea of creating a permanent fund to help these organizations so they would not be dependent on going to the Town.”

Sparks recently presented the fund with a \$250 check after closing on the first of 14 homes within the Town of Black Mountain. In what he considers to be a “pay it forward” gesture, he will continue to make these contributions when the sale of each home is finalized.

“We sold the first home in two days, and that is because of this community,” Sparks said. “The fund fosters the strengthening of this community, and that’s why I wanted to give back. I like to think that people buy my homes because of the good designs I have. But 90 percent of it is that they want to be part of the fabric of this community, and what creates and strengthens that fabric is the efforts of this organization.”

For Hibbard and others involved with the Black Mountain-Swannanoa Endowment Fund, the willingness to help neighbors in the Valley from community members like Sparks is the continuation of what caring individuals set out to do from the beginning.

“I think what Charlie is doing will inspire people,” Hibbard said. “He heard about what the endowment fund was doing, and it had meaning for him, and I think that’s a tremendous story.”