

Athens Area Habitat for Humanity

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Athens Eye Surgeon Funds Phase 2 of Neighborhood Renewal Project

(Athens, GA) Returning home to Watkinsville, GA, after performing eye surgery on a charity mission to Dominican Republic, Dr. Michael Jacobs was tired. Happy, but tired.

That's when his wife Mindy asked a simple question that would chart a new philanthropic course for Dr. Jacobs: "Why don't you help some people here?"

He explained that charity medical work is easier overseas where there's less red tape. But still, he couldn't shake the idea. "We've been really blessed," says Jacobs, "so we try to give back in the way that we can."

It was the example of his father that pointed the way. "My dad has worked with Habitat for Humanity for many years, especially since his retirement, and as a kid I would go with him, so naturally Habitat came to mind. I spoke with (Athens Habitat director) Spencer Frye and discovered that the local Athens affiliate wasn't just building houses, they're building and reclaiming entire neighborhoods, and I wanted to be a part of that."

At first, the idea was to volunteer at a Habitat site with others at his practice as a team-building exercise. Then, being an ophthalmologist, Dr. Jacobs had the idea to donate safety glasses to the crew and other volunteers. But he still wanted "something bigger, a partnership that would have a larger impact."

And that's when he bought a house — for a stranger.

Phase 1 of Habitat's "ReNew Athens" neighborhood reclamation project on Magnolia Terrace had already been sponsored by Athens First United Methodist Church and will celebrate its ribbon-cutting in July. Together with Wells Fargo Bank, Dr. Jacobs' Athens Eye Associates and Surgical Care Affiliates contributed more than \$30,000 to sponsor Phase 2, which will transform abandoned housing into homes for two Athens families.

“With ReNew Athens,” director Frye explains, “we can provide shelter for folks who can’t afford market rents, people working part time, minimum-wage. At the same time we’re revitalizing neighborhoods, and rents help fund further restoration and new homes for families who can afford to buy but who don’t qualify for standard housing loans at interest.”

The kickoff for Phase 2 will take place on Saturday, June 24th, at 136 Magnolia Terrace when Dr. Jacobs and his team present the Habitat crew with the first donation of safety glasses, and renovation officially begins on the second stage of the neighborhood revitalization project.

“There are a lot of reasons to do this,” observes Jacobs, “but for me, the biggest thing is being an example to my kids like my father was for me. It’s about being a good dad.”

When asked what’s next, Jacobs smiles and says, “You’ll have to wait and see. I love a challenge, and I’m already thinking of how we can bring this challenge to other groups of professionals to step up and make even bigger things happen.”

But whatever the future may hold, the generosity of Dr. Jacobs and his associates, Wells Fargo Bank, and Athens First United Methodist Church is already sure to touch the lives of local families in need.