



meet the **Teferra-Shemelis** family

Family comes first for Beniyam Teferra and Hana Shemelis. The couple, who each were raised in large, close-knit families, dream of the opportunity to live in a home that they can call their own, which offers ample space for themselves and their three active children, ages one, six and nine.

The family has been renting a small two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment built in the 1960s. In addition to a critical shortage of living space, persistent and unmitigated health concerns include the presence of mold in one bathroom, as well as the pervasive use of lead – a common component once used in construction during the era of the building. Outdoor access for the active family also is a concern. “Our children, who have a love of learning and are optimistic and outgoing, have never known what it’s like to have a clean, safe home with a yard to play in – especially one in which they can invite their friends.”

Due to the formidable hardships, Beniyam, who holds an academic degree in logistics, but currently works in passenger assistance for the local headquarters of a national aviation and aerospace component manufacturer, and Hana, who is employed as an attendant in a large gaming and entertainment experience in the St. Louis metropolitan area, completed an application to be considered as potential Habitat homeowners. The proud, dedicated and hard-working parents, who currently have no family in the area or a support system in place, work opposite schedules so that one is always available to care for their children.

It’s always a momentous day when homeowner applicants are notified that they have been selected to begin the journey toward homeownership. “Getting the news that we were selected was the best day of our lives,” Beniyam said. “We know we are fortunate to be considered as Habitat homeowners and we will work hard toward achieving our goals,” he added. As part of the process of becoming a Habitat homeowner, the motivated couple is in the process of completing a comprehensive financial coaching program that Habitat facilitates; a simple home maintenance class; an instructional class on how to navigate the home mortgage closing process; and a tutorial, as well as a counseling session, on housing assistance sponsored by a local community resource and development organization.

In addition, Beniyam and Hana will participate in Habitat’s sweat-equity program of performing the required number of hours in the building of their own home, as well on other Habitat projects. “Habitat offers a ‘hand up’ to families that are in need of decent homes in which they pay an affordable mortgage,” Beniyam said. “Working to build our home alongside the many dedicated Habitat volunteers is a life-changing experience,” Beniyam added. “Thank you from the bottom of my heart to Habitat, and to everyone who participates in this process.”