IT TAKES GUTS

N.J. students ‘deconstruct’ apartment to sell parts

Project to help Habitat for Humanity.

By Ashley Meeks
Sun-News Reporter

LAS CRUCES — Usually, groups that spend spring break in Las Cruces with Habitat for Humanity install cabinets, doorknobs and countertops.

The 19-person group from Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J., however, is spending their week “deconstructing,” in the words of student Nicole Migliore, 23.

New Jersey native Migliore, a biomedical engineering senior, 14 other students, three faculty and six assistants and one parent, are gutting 57 apartments at the Alta Tierra complex on East Madrid Avenue. Tierra del Sol Housing Corporation, with Albuquerque-based nonprofit Yes Housing and contractor Pavilion Construction, donated the guts to Habitat for Humanity as part of a Green Communities initiative.

Habitat will sell them at deep discount (a kitchen’s worth of cabinets will set you back about $300) at the ReStore, at 2301 S. Main St.

The group departs Saturday.

Jim Petrecelli, an electrician from Norwood, N.J., said he signed up for the trip to do something with his daughter, Amanda, a senior at Stevens who joined Habitat trip who “begged and groveled” in fundraising letters across campus.

“They fund-raise for months before,” he said of the Stevens “brainiacs.” “It’s not like they’re on anybody’s dime. It was a lot more effort than them saying ‘We want to do this’ and signing up with an organization.”

By mid-day Wednesday, two truckloads of home furnishings had been carted back to the ReStore, said Ed Pollock, a photographer who also works for the store.

“This is a lot different from what we’re used to doing,” Migliore said. “But we’re still working.”

“We’re taking out door handles, anything that could be sold again,” said fellow biomedical engineering senior Amanda Grimes, 21, from Delaware. “I’ve been having a lot of fun. We all have. I’ve never been anywhere, so it’s a new environment. It’s nice to see someone else and also being able to feel like I’m doing something and not just go home.”

Bangladesh-native Syed Akbar, 23, a senior studying engineering management and music technology, agreed, calling the experience “good times, good times,” especially the day trips to White Sands, a downtown concert and hiking Dripping Springs. Having traveled to 31 countries, he said, the Mesilla Valley reminded him most of the Alice Springs area of Australia.

Habitat for Humanity volunteers Jonathan Rivas, 19, left, Steve Blythe, Siena York-Carr, 23, and Amanda Grimes, 21, work together Wednesday to remove a cabinet from an apartment at the Alta Tierra complex. The cabinet will later be sold at a discount (a kitchen’s worth of cabinets will set you back about $300) at the ReStore, at 2301 S. Main St.

Nicole Migliore, 23, of Hoboken, N.J. carries a mirror cabinet Wednesday out of an apartment from the Alta Tierra complex. The college student is spending her spring break helping Habitat for Humanity collect old cabinets, blinds, appliances and other odds and ends from the complex as it undergoes a refurbishing.

“I want to challenge my whole body,” Akbar said, something his mother didn’t let him do because of a breathing condition. “I’m doing training.”

Stevens sends a team every year, Migliore said: “This is a really cool way to meet people at your school you wouldn’t usually get to meet and see other parts of the country that have a lot of culture, and of course relaxing.”

Yup, when you’re working on your bachelor’s and master’s (as many are in this bunch), plus working a co-op job and raising $15,000 through sales of books and baked goods, raffles and penny drops to take your spring break, tearing out tubs is a breeze, Migliore said: “It’s not really working, because you’re doing it with your friends. It feels good to do something productive with your time.”

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To view a letter from NMSU Interim President Waded Cruzado outlining public service projects local students plan for spring break, log on to www.lcsun-news.com and click on the link at the top of this story.