



Photo by Andy Ellis | Laredo Morning Times
Anita Medellin, left, prepares to hug Carol Sherwood, Habitat for Humanity volunteer executive director, as Rick Ramirez, division president of Armadillo Homes, smiles.

HABITAT GETS JOB DONE

By **TRICIA CORTEZ**
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Two weeks before Anita Medellin was planning to move into a new home with her two daughters, she received a surprise before hundreds of guests.

"We're not going to finish your house on time," Rick Ramirez, division president with Armadillo Homes, told her at a Tuesday-night Habitat for Humanity fundraiser.

Medellin, who was onstage with Ramirez and Habitat board members and staff, smiled and shrugged her shoulders in resignation.

As the group guessed at when her house might be finished, Ramirez said, "How about now because it's ready."

The audience gasped in surprise and stood up to ap-

plaud, as Medellin wiped away tears and was told she could move into her home that night.

A single mother of two who works as a teacher assistant at Webb County Head Start, Medellin is taking online classes to finish a bachelor's degree. Her goal is to become a teacher.

Habitat made Medellin's dream of owning a home come true, and Armadillo, one of its partners, made it happen faster than expected.

"I'm so excited ... there wouldn't be any other way," Medellin said before the ceremony, noting that raising two children on her salary has made it impossible for her to buy or even rent a house in Laredo.

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Tuesday night, however, she became a new homeowner and new taxpayer, and will be making payments on a zero-interest mortgage.

"As a last resort, I thought I could apply for (public) housing but they have a very long wait list," Medellin said.

She currently lives with her mother, Maria de Lourdes Medellin.

Her mother attended the event with Anita's sister Grizelda Vilalobos and sister-in-law Rachel Medellin. All four sat a table purchased by Habitat sponsor ConocoPhillips.

Through Habitat, a faith-based program started by former President Jimmy Carter, Medellin has learned how to build a home from the ground up. She has also experienced the joy of helping another low-income family build their home.

Medellin becomes the 35th family to move into a home built by the 13-year-old Habitat for Humanity of Laredo-Webb County.

After applying for a Habitat home last summer and being approved in April, Medellin contributed 425 hours of volunteer "sweat equity," as required, and gave an additional 150 hours.

At the fundraiser, she was presented with a Bible, "because we

believe that all God's children should be able to afford a simple, decent home to live in," said Carol Sherwood, Habitat's volunteer executive director. Meanwhile, waiters handed out large soft loaves of bread.

The latter is symbolic of a Russian tradition to break bread for a new house, and to ensure that no one in the Medellin home is in need, a Habitat official said.

Aside from the dedication ceremony, the Tuesday fundraiser was also designed to raise a minimum of \$60,000 for five homes in Tierra Prometida, a 50-home Habitat subdivision off Texas 359.

"We anticipate making that," Sherwood said.

During the fundraiser, hundreds of guests giggled and quickly attempted to build the most elaborate home with marshmallows, toothpicks and graham crackers.

"Substandard housing is not allowed," Sherwood joked, noting the moral of the dinner activity was to show that it's not easy to build a home.

Webb County Sheriff Rick Flores and Laredo Bucks hockey coach Terry "Roscoe" Ruskowski presided over the house-making event.

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