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Bethany finds funds by flipping homes, imaginative fundraising

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By Dawn Neuses, dneuses@qconline.com

COLONA -- Renovating and selling homes has become a new way for Bethany for Children & Families to raise money for its programs.

The non-profit is completing its second home renovation at 718 4th St., Colona, and estimates it will receive \$60,000 to \$70,000 for the three-bedroom house, money that will go to support the various programs it provides to area children and families.

"We are just being imaginative and trying to diversify our fundraising," said Jenny Hager, Bethany's vice president of marketing and development.

The agency gets most of its funding from federal and state sources, which are shrinking. Ms. Hager said Bethany always can use cash donations, but planning a fundraiser can take a lot of staff time and likely won't raise as much revenue as the sale of a house.

The project also allows Bethany to raise money in a manner that meshes with its mission: to keep children safe, strengthen families, and build healthy communities, said Joscelyn Stone, Bethany's communications coordinator.

The Colona house went through foreclosure and Wells Fargo gave it to Bethany in March. Gutting began in April.

Twenty-six local businesses and trade unions donated labor and materials to the renovation. Ms. Hager estimates 150 volunteers helped with the project, from college students to corporate executives.



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Photo: Todd Welvaert

Jenny Hager, vice president of marketing, and Joscelyn Stone, communications coordinator for Bethany for Children and Families, stand in the front yard the charity's second rehabbed house in Colona, Wednesday, Oct. 17, 2012. The agency is rehabbing houses as a way to raise money for its programs, a new idea for a non-profit.



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Photo: Todd Welvaert

Jenny Hager, vice president of marketing for Bethany for Children and Families, stands in a the kitchen of the charity's second rehabbed house in Colona, Wednesday, Oct. 17, 2012. The agency is rehabbing houses as a way to raise money for its programs, a new idea for a non-profit.

Volunteers removed three layers of paneling from the walls, scraped off tiles glued to the ceiling, painted, installed a new kitchen and appliances, and tore down and built some walls.

The original wiring installed in the 1920s was removed and the house rewired. It also has new plumbing, front porch, duct work, roof, lawn and landscaping. Early next month a new water heater and furnace will be installed.

The village waived building permit fees and neighbors showed up with shovels one day and offered to help, Ms. Hager said.

A market analysis of similar homes in the neighborhood put its approximate value at \$79,000.

"We are awestruck by the community support," Ms. Stone said.

"Everyone has done a great job to bring this home from a blighted property to something a family can live in," Ms. Hager said. "I keep bragging about the community support, but it was overwhelming."

In 2010, Bethany rehabbed and sold a Rock Island house to a single mother of three, also with community support and donations. That house also was donated to Bethany.

Bethany was founded 113 years ago as an orphanage, and community donations and support allowed the agency to feed, clothe and take care of the children, Ms. Hager said.

The non-profit now provides foster care and adoption services, mental health services, prevention services, after-school care for children with behavior disorders, low-interest car loans for struggling parents, and teen parent services.

"It's 113 years later, and still it is the same thing," Ms. Hager said. "We are still going strong because the community is sustaining us."

Anyone interested in the home for sale can call Ms. Hager at (309) 797-7700.