

Teen's memory honored with two Habitat houses

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"I can't express how much gratitude I have for the Burns family, for Habitat and everybody who helped in this process," he said.

"I love Habitat not because they build houses, but because they build communities," said Doug's mother, Linda Brooks.

"For me, Habitat was building my confidence, knowing that I could take care of my children," she said. "Watching my son build a house is amazing. I am so blessed to see this young couple become a strong team building a home for their baby. I just want to thank Habitat for everything that they do. You don't build houses. You build lives and are such a blessing."

"The Burns family was great to work with," said Doug Taylor, executive director of Habitat for Lafayette. "I didn't know them before, but I do now. They were at the work site almost every day. They were such an encouragement to us in their time of grief."

"This was a fantastic build," he said. "We had so many people who loved Christian and worked on the house. I've been with Habitat since the first house — this makes 285 houses. Every house is a miracle and a blessing."

For every house built in the Lafayette area by Habitat, a house also is built in Haiti.

"There are three purposes for why we are doing this," Taylor said. "The first is to acknowledge and to thank God for his faithfulness in

our lives, not only in Doug and Betsy's life, in providing the resources and the people to build their house, but this is an acknowledgement of God's faithfulness in all our lives."

The second reason was to celebrate the Shaws' new home. The couple put in 250 hours of sweat equity each and went to classes to prepare them for home ownership.

"The third reason we are here is to remember and celebrate the life of Christian Burns," Taylor said.

During the build, friends wrote notes on boards that are now covered in drywall.

"Those are testimonies of Christian's life, and I feel I've kind of gotten to know him just reading the comments on those studs," Taylor said.

"It is true that a person's grief can be eased by helping others," said Christian's mother, Marti Burns. "We want to thank the entire Habitat family for inviting us to be part of their world of helping others through building homes."

"We want to thank all of you who have raised money with us ... who built with us, grieved with us, and who helped each other this whole year without Christian," she said. "We will be forever grateful. And Doug, Betsy, and Lola — this house is full of so much love. We are very happy for you and we hope that love just grows and grows."

Fund raising for the Habitat house exceeded the cost of one home, so plans changed to have a second (Continued on Page 5)



Christian Burns



More than 200 family members and friends gathered for the May 31 house blessing. "This was a fantastic build," said Doug Taylor, executive director of Habitat for Lafayette. "We had so many people who loved Christian and worked on the house."



Above: Eric and Marti Burns present Doug and Betsy Shaw with the key to their new home. Below left are photos of messages to Christian Burns that were written on boards while building the house. Below right: Father Patrick Baikauskas, OP, speaks while Doug Taylor looks on.



'We hope that love just grows and grows ...'



The Shaw family — Doug, Betsy and Lola — and the Burns family — Eric, Marti, Alex, Sarah and Stewart — gather for a photo after the house blessing. (Photos by Caroline B. Mooney)



Above is the newly built home in honor of Christian Burns. Below left are memory bands for people to wear as they do "one more rep, one more task ... or one more act of kindness." Below right is a stone with Christian's name that sits in front of the Shaws' new home.

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home built, dubbed the "One More" house.

An athlete, Burns wrote "One More" in masking tape on his weight room wall to push himself to always do one more exercise. He lived the motto in all aspects of his life and it has inspired others.

"We had a marvelous 17 years with a great boy and a fine young man," said Eric Burns, Christian's father. "When I think about Christian's life, I see a grand door, made out of stone, steel and brick. Standing in that doorway is my son looking out. He looks out at a lot of you next to him — family members and friends — and all he sees is bright, beautiful light and much promise. And when that went dark, we as a family and we as a community needed to start looking for light again. And the light that we found was small and glimmering."

"Those little bits of light have grown together with all of the family and the friends, teammates, classmates, coaches and teachers. All those kind words and kind thoughts truly did help," he said. "And then Marti found Habitat, or maybe Habitat found Marti. And all those points of light finally had a focus. And here you are. There was a focus to help others build a legacy for a lovely young family and to remember Christian."

"This house will outlive us all," Burns said. "And in front of that house, solid, is a rock that dedicates it to Christian. We are very proud of that. We are making a home for the Shaw family and we are also making a remembrance for Christian Thomas Burns and for his life, and for all of that, the Burns family is very thankful."

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Father Patrick Baikauskas, OP, is pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, West Lafayette, where the Burns family are parishioners.

"Christian was a young man who was very concerned about what he could do to pass on his faith to other people in his life — an extraordinary gift for one so young. I was able to witness this at St. Tom's in his confirmation group," he said. "I was reflecting on Christian and what his legacy has already been — this idea of 'One More.' I was recalling a prayer that is attributed to St. Mother Teresa, words she had in front of every sister in every convent, to inspire them to recognize that our culture challenges us in ways that can seem daunting. But we have a Lord who gives us all the strength that we need. Christian recognized that. I hope we will as well as we hear these words:

"People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. / If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. / If you are successful, people may envy you. Be honest and sincere, people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway. / What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. / If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway. / The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. / Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway. / In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

