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Habitat houses go up as temperatures go down

BY ALLISON KENNEDY

You know what they say about the weather in these parts: If you don't like it, hang around a few days. Columbus' 75-degree temperatures last week gave way to 45 degrees Monday, as the weekend's cold front.

But to most of the young people here for the Habitat for Humanity Collegiate Challenge, Monday's weather is balmy.

"This is beach weather," said Kelly Leather, a 21-year-old senior from Sacred Heart University in Columbus.

Monday marked the first day of the annual build. Six houses are going up on Bragg Smith Street, a block between Five colleges and one girls' boarding school are represented here, totaling 167 students. They're from various schools and churches. They'll leave Friday.

Next Monday will bring 44 students from two other colleges for a second week of building.

This is how the students are spending their spring break.

Brinkley Pound, the newly hired director for Columbus Area Habitat, is experiencing her first Collegiate Challenge. She said the students were eager to get to work Monday.

"It was hard for me to keep them from going to the site this morning," Pound said, as the sound of their tools echoed through the narrow street.

The day began with a devotional led by Evelyn "Mimi" Woodson, Columbus City Councilor from Duff. The students dispersed to the six sites. The walls went up Monday morning.

The Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, Conn., sent 18 people. One of them, 17-year-old Sara Karr. She said another student had a tear in her pants and she gave up her sweats.

Local builder Tom Moore was overseeing the work on a house being built by the University of Pittsburgh at Columbus State. It's his fourth year working with the Pitt students, and they've built up a camaraderie. "At this age, I wouldn't have done this," said Moore, who graduated from Georgia Southwestern University.

Pitt senior Lauren Goroff, 21, is here for her fourth spring break. As the Red Hot Chili Peppers band's lead singer, Goroff smiled as she reported the weather from Cleveland, her hometown.

"It's snowing there," she said.

Columbus resident Mae Buler wants to own her own Habitat home and was putting in some volunteer hours on Monday. She has lived in public housing for 34 years.

"It'll be exciting to have my own home," she said. "I can decorate. I can have ownership."

This is the 18th year of the local college build.

Aspiring homeowners must put in 500 total "sweat equity" hours on Habitat sites. If they qualify, their hours are figured into the mortgage.

Bragg Smith Street is named for former Columbus resident Bragg Smith. He died Sept. 30, 1903, while trying to rescue the city's engineering and public services director, Robert L. Johnson. Johnson was killed when a pole on 11th Street caved in and buried him. Smith, now buried in Porterdale Cemetery, was honored with a shaft on his grave, as well as an historic marker. Pound said the marker is missing from its pole and has been replaced.