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#1 Choice For

Big help for the 'Littles'

News

Posted By MATTHEW VAN DONGEN STANDARD STAFF

Posted 7 days ago

Attention, new homebuyers: with a single purchase, you could wipe out a waiting list of hundreds of kids looking for a Big Brother or Big Sister in Niagara.

That's right, a single newly bought building could help more than 300 kids build a life-changing relationship with a new friend and mentor. It's possible thanks to an innovative partnership between four regional Big Brother Big Sister agencies and Mason Homes.

The firm announced Thursday it will build a two-storey home on Chicory Cres. next month and donate sale proceeds to match boys and girls with a Big Brother or Sister.

"I'm told there are 350 kids on the waiting list all over Niagara. If we sell for more than \$300,000, we could practically clear that list," said Sean Mason, vice-president of the Toronto-based construction company. "Th at would be pretty powerful stuff ."

Big Brothers Big Sisters hooks up caring volunteers with children and youths in need of help, but the carefully regulated, safety-conscious mentoring program doesn't run for free, said Dale Davis, who heads the district agency for St. Catharines and Thorold.

Volunteer screening, meetings with social workers and regular monitoring means it costs around \$1,000 to match a single volunteer with a child, Davis said. The four agencies across Niagara already serve about 1,225 kids.

The unique project, called Build for Kids' Sake, is new to Niagara, Davis said, but local trades and businesses have embraced the idea and ensured virtually every aspect of the build is provided free.

"I'm so excited about this because it is such a community effort," she said at the announcement.

Mason Homes donated the \$130,000 plot of land and will supervise the construction effort.

Davis said most of the building materials, expertise and time needed for the project is coming free of charge, with financial donations expected to cover the remaining costs. PenFinancial Credit Union is also donating a year of mortgage payments to entice potential buyers.

Davis said many "Littles" -- the kids who have mentors through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program -- will come out to watch the new home go up over 10 days, starting Sept. 24.

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Rhonda Dobson is hoping the house helps swell the legion of Littles, which includes her own son, Cameron.

"This has been the most positive experience of our life, and we were lucky not to have to wait too long," said Dobson, watching her nine-year-old run around in a hard hat Thursday.

Cameron recently lost his father, John, and two grandparents to cancer within a three-month span.

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