

PAY IT FORWARD

# homecoming party!

Drew and Jonathan, who've been working with Habitat for Humanity for over 20 years, recently helped the org's L.A. chapter complete its 1001st build in Long Beach, California. Meet one deserving family who'll be moving in this month, and find out how you can help! **BY CLAIRE BRITO**

Cynthia and Valdemar Chavez-Evangelista both grew up in Long Beach, California. They went to the same high school but didn't meet until they became coworkers after graduating. "Everyone thought we met at school, but we're like, 'Nope—we met at Target!'" Cynthia laughs. The couple soon married and had two sons: Valdemar, now 12, is an ace baseball player, and Logan, 10, is running for class president. "They're both great students. Logan likes to help people at school. He's a math wiz. They work really hard, and homework is always done," says their dad.

This spring marks a new chapter in the family's story: homeownership. After years of living in rental apartments, they're set to move into a new home in Long Beach's Millennium Development, a 10-townhouse complex and the 1001st home built by Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles. The organization is best known for the construction process (building 4,000 new homes across the U.S. each year), but it also finances the sale, making market-value homes in areas like Long Beach affordable to lower-income families. Drew and Jonathan, who helped with the complex's build, have worked with the organization for 20 years—four of those as Habitat Humanitarians, a group of champion advocates—because they know its impact. "We've seen firsthand how affordable homeownership changes lives," says Jonathan. "Owning your own home—it's not even just the American dream, it's a human dream; it's a family dream." Drew adds: "We're always thrilled and humbled to help make that dream a reality for more families. Home has also been the first line of defense against the pandemic, so it's more important than ever to make sure more families have



access to safe and healthy housing."

Learning of their selection via Zoom on November 11, 2021, is a moment the couple will never forget, Cynthia says. "I thought, *Is this real!?*" she remembers. The call punctuated an intensive application process initiated three years prior, before the pandemic brought additional hardships, including a mold outbreak in their current two-bedroom that sparked concern for the boys' health during remote learning. "I thought it was a long shot," says Valdemar Sr. "But I figured, well, they're going to help somebody; maybe it could be us." Habitat LA, which received inquiries from over 1,500 families, was impressed with the family's level of community involvement.

The program provides all future homeowners with courses in home maintenance, personal finance, and the mortgage process, as well as a

low-interest mortgage, in return for "sweat equity": volunteer hours on builds or doing office work. It was rigorous, says Cynthia, and it was worth it. "I can't wait to walk into the house with the kids for the first time, for them to get to choose their rooms," she says. The boys already have interior design plans: Valdemar Jr. plans to paint his walls blue, while Logan is opting for bright orange. And Mom and Dad are just happy they can start saying yes, says Cynthia: "Yes, we can be homeowners. Yes, you can have a pet. Yes, we can paint your room."

**The Chavez-Evangelista family outside of their new forever home in Long Beach's Millennium Development, a community build that Drew and Jonathan helped with last fall.**

## get involved!

Every April, Habitat for Humanity holds its Home is the Key campaign to raise funds and awareness. Support their wonderful work by donating or volunteering at your local chapter. Learn more at [habitat.org/key](https://habitat.org/key).