



Agency Happenings

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Visits CAC of Fayette County Self-Help Housing Program



From left to right: Denise Pontius, Fiscal Officer; U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; Patty Griffiths, Housing Director; Bambi Baughn, Executive Director

On Wednesday, June 27 United States Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack visited the Community Action Commission of Fayette County's Self-Help Housing program site and the home of the Noel family in Washington Court House to celebrate National Home Ownership Month.

The CAC of Fayette County has been running their Self-Help Housing program with a USDA Rural Development Grant for almost 20 years. The program requires families to complete at least 65 percent of the labor needed to construct their home and receive a USDA 502 mortgage. Additionally, participants are required to attend weekly homeowner education courses during the home's construction, ensuring proper, long-term maintenance of the home. Since the program started in 1993, 237 homes have been provided to county residents with self-help grants totaling more than \$3.5 million.

The CAC of Fayette County and the Noel family were given less than a week's notice about the secretary's visit. Bambi Baughn, executive director for CAC of Fayette County said that while they've had many visits from other government officials over the years she's never seen anything quite like this. "They blocked off the streets and I had to be escorted to see him. There were all sorts of men in black around. There was a lot of protocol." But Ms. Baughn



The Noel family with Secretary Vilsack

said that the secretary was very personable, friendly and sympathetic.

The Noel family, husband Coty, wife Jacquie and children Alandriah and Ryker, received their home through the Self-Help Housing program in January 2011 after months of working with other families in the neighborhood to build their homes. Jacquie Noel's parents were one of the first groups to build a home through the Self-Help program 18 years ago. CAC officials praised the Noels for being a fantastic family to work with in the Self-Help Housing program because of their willingness to work hard during the construction process. When informed by CAC that the secretary would be visiting their home the Noels worked hard to get their home spotless, recruiting the help of some friends. The secretary toured the home during his visit and installed the Energy Star certification plaque.



Sec. Vilsack and Mrs. Noel hang the Energy Star plaque on her house

Secretary Vilsack spoke from a podium in the Noel's garage about several issues, but mostly focused on the economic situation of Americans and Ohioans in general. He promoted home refinancing loans through the USDA as a way for American's to save money, saying, "Strong communities and strong economies support strong values."



Sec. Vilsack speaks in the Noel's garage