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CHISPA, city and Hartnell students join in home-building projects



Gabe Torres of Community Housing Improvement System Planning Association (CHISPA) is pictured June 17 outside a house built in a partnership with the City of Salinas with help from Hartnell College students. Scott MacDonald

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Hartnell College students are learning not only how to build a house in theory but how to put on their work boots and erect the beams and pour the cement themselves.

"They're out on a real job site, with all the sounds and weather and maybe hitting their thumb with a hammer," said John Anderson, the Hartnell instructor.

"It really rounds out their education."

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Anderson, who lives along the Highway 68 corridor, has taught sustainable design and construction at the college for three years as part of



Hartnell College Sustainable Design and Construction instructor John Anderson, center right, goes over blueprints with students in a house built through a partnership between Community Housing Improvement System Planning Association (CHISPA) and the City of Salinas with help from Hartnell College students. Provided photo

the Hartnell Construction Technology Program.

Also involved are the city of Salinas and CHISPA. A nonprofit organization, CHISPA builds homes and apartments for lower-income families.

Through a federal grant designated for housing, the city and CHISPA make available abandoned single-family lots to build one affordable single-family home per year.

"This isn't just about one lucky family being able to buy a home," said Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA's president and chief executive officer. "It's also about economic development and enhancing the job skills of our local workforce."



The kitchen of the house features cabinets made by students at Salinas High School. Scott MacDonald

The latest product of the students' enlightened labor is a 1,250-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath single-story house. It sits behind a seven-foot fence on a 5,174-square-foot-lot at 124 Soledad St.

The place was a vacant lot, popular with drifters and drug-users. To clean it required four huge Dumpsters to handle the debris. A hazmat unit was brought in to pick up all of the drug needles.

In the newly leveled space, an olive-colored house with yellow trim arose.

Anderson, who started as a carpenter, has 40 years in the business.

"I found I had my brain power in my hands," he said. "Same with many of my Hartnell students."

"Building and erecting structures just appeals to a lot of people."

The Hartnell students not only work under Anderson's guidance, they work next to



A tankless hot water heater is one of several environmentally friendly features of the house. Scott MacDonald

DETAILS

For information on buying the house, contact Maria Ortega-Reich in the CHISPA office, 831-757-6251.

To reach the Center for Advanced Technology, call 831-755-6960, or go to www.hartnell-advtech.com.

veteran contractors and suppliers. Those veterans have the wisdom of years, and they take time to impart pointers.

"Students learn [in class] and then go out and work on the job site," Anderson said.

"It's a brand-new curriculum, and the relationship with CHISPA is gold."

Diana Palacios, a Gonzales High School graduate, is one to have benefited from the Hartnell program. Palacios' father worked in construction, and she'd go to job sites with him. That's how she got interested.

"I'd help him measure, get the right tools and lumber — and clean up, too," she said.

Palacio has been involved with two of the student-built houses, she said.

"Mainly managerial things," she said. "Working with ordering materials and purchase order forms. It came naturally to me, but I definitely learned how to work on a bigger job site."

She learned about plumbing and concrete forms and about how to apply for the many permits, too. The experience taught her much about human relations. As a woman, Palacios found it a challenge to give directions to the men in the crew.

"Not many men find it easy to take orders from a woman," she said. "It's really an art. I found the best approach is just to suggest."

Part of the learning involves the strict standards Anderson sets on a site, she said. That was another thing she learned.

"Mr. Anderson would not let us take short-cuts," Palacios said.

The sustainable construction the students use stresses energy-saving materials and techniques, said Gabe Torres, CHISPA's vice president for construction.

Those measures include low-flow plumbing fixtures, such as dual flush toilets, plus recycled composite carpeting and formaldehyde-free insulation.

The on-demand heater in the garage took a week to install. That's only because it became a teaching tool.

Experts in plumbing and electrical, for example, lectured on the heater's installation as students gathered around it, and the garage became an impromptu field classroom.

The house is now on the market. It's handicapped-accessible, offering a roll-in shower in one of the two bathrooms, for example.

Asking price is \$170,000. Buyers' income must be below 80 percent of the Monterey County median to qualify.

Also, it must be sold to a buyer who has lived or worked in Salinas for at least the past two years, city regulations say. (The city provided the land.)

CHISPA will sell the home to an eligible low-income family. The money goes back into a CHISPA fund until the next house is ready for building.

Successful as the program is, the lack of job prospects is, of course, a concern to the student builders going through the program, Anderson said.

"We know the economy is in the tank, and there's not many opportunities right now," he said.

"As the economy improves, though, the timing could be perfect for a new batch of builders with a sustainable attitude, who will have a huge influence on how we build things in the future."

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