



**Chris Swan, pictured at the under-construction Swan House at 941 Shawano Ave., is making his difference by coordinating the building of new homes for people who need help with their housing, such as a single parent with children who is pursuing a four-year college degree. The Business News photo by J.A. Robb**

# Swan's house is more than a home

Area contractor believes his charitable projects help build community

By Sue Bodilly

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Chris Swan will be the first to acknowledge that credit for the nearly completed Swan House at 941 Shawano Ave., Green Bay, should go to the many volunteers, businesses and organizations that donated time and materials to complete the project.

He credits people such as "volunteer extraordinaire" Glen Ward and Ashwaubenon High School students Vince Workman III and Chris Parker as examples of the sweat equity invested by the community.

Still, if someone was keeping tabs, it is Swan, a construction contractor, who tallied the largest investment in the project, having devoted his time, expertise, company equipment and personal resources since beginning the project in October 2005.

The Swan House will be made available to a single parent who is pursuing a four-year degree from an area college or university. Applications to rent the three-bedroom, two-bathroom, 1,800-square-foot house across from Green Bay West High School, are now being accepted. The recipient will receive a housing scholarship for reduced rent.

"Whether others see the benefit is not important," said Swan. "It's what I'm compelled to do, and that's to make a lasting impact on families in Green Bay."

The focus, he said, should be placed not on the volunteers, but the family that will be positively affected and, in return, have a positive

## People who make a difference

► **Chris Swan**

**Area construction contractor and founder of The Swan Group**

impact on the community because of it.

A native of Chicago, Swan and his partner and co-founder of The Swan Group, Jim Rose, built the first Swan House in Chicago. The Shawano Avenue home is the second Swan House, and ground will be broken soon for a third owner-occupied Swan House on Day St. in Green Bay.

Swan was introduced to the Green Bay community in 2001 by a friend. He has since become a Green Bay resident and has established himself as a vocal leader on behalf of minorities and minority businessmen — a role he takes seriously.

He is chair emeritus for the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Chancellor's Council on Diversity, and chairperson of the Entrepreneur of Colors Council (E.C.C.) — an organization providing information and education to help minority businesses find business opportunities. He serves as an instructor for the Entrepreneurial Youth Leadership Institute, a two-week summer program on the UW-Green Bay campus, exposing high school students to businesses and the stock market, while helping them develop the creativity and confidence needed to develop a business plan. Swan's reputation for civic engagement is notable.

"Chris Swan and Swan Corp. represent the very best of what we mean when we refer to good corporate citizens," said minority advocate and community volunteer Mike Stearney, who is also assistant dean for student development at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

"Chris has a vision of how businesses and individuals can create partnerships to strengthen communities," said Stearney. "His construction expertise, combined with the generous donation of materials and labor by many community businesses and supplemented by thousands of hours of volunteer time, has meant more than housing for a single parent college student... this partnership has built capacity.

"An empty city lot has a new house on it, so a neighborhood is improved and the tax base is enhanced," Stearney said. "A single parent has a place to raise her kids while she finishes college, so their lives and aspirations will be lifted by her achievement. Finally, more than one hundred volunteers, mostly young people, have received a valuable lesson in civic responsibility (not to mention lessons in framing, wiring, plumbing, drywall installation, etc). Thus, they are much more likely to contribute time to other civic causes in their neighborhoods and communities. Everybody wins, and it builds momentum for more positive change."

The community began recognizing Swan's efforts when he helped proponents of the Lambear Field renovation project create more jobs for minorities.

A look back at former reports show that an agreement between his company, Swan Corp 1,

and three local unions, marked the largest number of minority workers (about 30) joining the union trades at one time in the North East Wisconsin Building and Construction Trades Council's 64-year history.

Why is that important?

"I see so many young people here that need the type of support I can offer and the values that I can share," Swan says. "I'm here to make a difference, and hopefully others will take on that type of attitude of giving. I'd like for the community to think beyond the bottom line. This project isn't about making money, but about partnering and letting others take part in economic empowerment. As a community, we can stand together or fall when it comes to social issues. But there will be overwhelming consequences if we don't see the importance of celebrating diverse ideas and people from all walks of life."

Two local businesses, Hurckman Heating and Cooling and Reeke-Marold Co. donated the fabricating and the duct work, as well as the labor for the mechanical and plumbing. Other members of the Swan House business support team includes Carrier Sales and Service, Werner Electric Supply, Eland Electric Corp., United Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Menards, DeKeyser Construction, Georgia Construction, Strategic Management and Associates and Signs and Such.

A recognition banquet and exhibitors showcase for supporters of the project will be held April 28, 2006 at the Phoenix Rooms of the University Union on the UW-Green Bay campus.