

Falk couple receives Lions humanitarian award

By Marc Maloney
Folsom Life writer
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As realtors, Jack and Sandi Falk know plenty about helping a client find a dream home. Recently, though, the term "dream home" has taken on a whole new meaning for the couple, who recently completed a trip that to East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to help build new homes for former New Orleans residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

For their efforts in Louisiana and their previous work to bring medical care to farm workers in Mexico, the Falks recently received a humanitarian award from the Roseville Sunrise Lions Club.

The Falks' decision to go to Louisiana to help hurricane victims stemmed from the frustration the couple felt as they watched television footage of the storm and its aftermath.

"When Katrina hit, Sandi and I wanted to help immediately," Jack recalled. "We wanted to be there in person and show them that America cares about them."

Showing they care, the Falks boarded an airplane this May and flew, at their own expense, to Louisiana, where they helped a group from Habitat for Humanity, the international nonprofit ecumenical Christian housing ministry that builds low-cost homes for families that need shelter.

The Falks spent a week helping build 14 homes in one East Baton Rouge neighborhood, spending most of their time working with other realtors and lenders from across the country on solid, if not fancy, houses for hurricane victims. Much of the work took place in less than ideal weather.

"It was hot and humid and it rained about daily," Falk said. Working in a newly-created subdivision, the crew methodically built one-story homes with three bedrooms, one and a half bathrooms, and a carport.

"The homes were all pretty standardized, and we had a lot of help," Falk said. "All of the concrete slabs were already poured when we arrived, and all the landscaping, plumbing, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) work was done by professionals."

For Falk, the looks on the faces of the people getting new homes was the best, most memorable part of the trip.

"All the people were really nice and so appreciative," he said. "Sandi said she'll never forget seeing the joy in the peoples' faces. We let them know that strangers care about them and want to help them."

The trip to Louisiana this June was not the first time the Falks have spent their own money traveling to aid people in need; the couple also has traveled to Mexico to help build medical clinics for farm workers. Jack sees some similarities between the trips.

"In both cases, we were able to give back and give hope, and we were able to make an immediate difference in someone's life," he said. "Also, in both cases, we left realizing there was lots more work to do there."

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SANDI FALK not only sells homes, she builds them. Here she cuts drywall for the interior of the Habitat for Humanity homes in East Baton Rouge, La.



JACK FALK balances on a ladder to nail particleboard around the exterior of a Habitat for Humanity home. Jack and Sandi Falk left their real estate business in Folsom to help build homes for victims of Hurricane Katrina.



FARM WORKERS LINE UP for care at the new clinic in Mexico. The Falks were there in November 2005 assisting with eye exams. The trip took two days by private plane. Most the pilots were doctors.