

# Schools provide new home for Seton Keough graduate

More than a year ago, students from three different Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore promised they would come together to refurbish a fire-damaged home in the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore City.

They kept their word. And so did Maya Simmons.

The 22-year-old graduate of the city's Seton Keough High School told herself she wouldn't cry Nov. 1 when students from Calvert Hall College High School, Towson, Notre Dame Preparatory School, Towson, and Maryvale Preparatory School in Brooklandville turned over the keys to her new home.

"I'm so overwhelmed with joy right now," Ms. Simmons said before a ceremony that included two new neighbors receiving homes through Habitat for Humanity.

The organization is a nonprofit Christian-based organization that builds affordable homes for those in need. All three schools have active clubs for the organization.

"Words can't express how I feel," she said as her two sons, Jaylin and Jeremiah played with family members alongside the house. "I never thought at 22 I would be a homeowner."

About 100 people - including Calvert Hall, NDP and Maryvale students who worked on the home - looked on as Ms. Simmons received a Bible and keys to her new home before she cut a ribbon and entered.

"To see the affect it has on her and see that she can finally enjoy it, it just makes everything more worth it," Notre Dame senior Erin Laschinger said.

Sitting in the shadows of Frederick Douglass Senior High School at the corner of Baker and Calhoun Streets, the house is also just 20 feet from the home she was sharing with her mother. The new house, complete with pink front and back doors, is a far cry from the structure the students saw last year when they arrived for work.

Groups from each school came together for the \$15,000 project every Saturday for the last year to gut and transform the home. They raised funds through flag football games, T-shirt sales and other innovative projects. Students described the house as intimidating when they first entered, but the finished project had freshly painted living room walls and new oak cabinets in the kitchen.

“It was scary,” Maryvale senior Molly Alsobook said of her first experience with the house. “We had never worked in construction and there were just holes in the floor. We were trying not to fall.”

The finished product produced gasps Nov. 1.

“I hadn’t seen it since the early stages when we were doing the floors, so it was amazing to see how much work had been done since” Maryvale senior Mary Kate Sanders said.

In the waning stages of the project, Ms. Simmons learned she would be receiving a home where she could raise 4-year-old Jaylin and Jeremiah, 1. Calvert Hall senior Greg Wohlfort got to know Ms. Simmons as he pitched in to complete the renovation.

On Nov. 1, Greg presented Ms. Simmons with flowers and keys to the house – and then embraced her. She smiled and offered a simple ‘thank you.’ The look on her face was enough for Greg.

“It was a big deal to build it,” he said, “but it was bigger for her to have the house.”