



Lab employee lends a helping hammer

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Below a soaring blue African sky, Laboratory employee Laura McClellan stood with other [Habitat for Humanity](#) volunteers in a line, passing along cement blocks to the masons raising the walls of a new house. When she could spare a moment, McClellan would soak up the view of backcountry Lesotho, a nation landlocked by South Africa. Mesas and canyons stretched into the distance much like they do at home in New Mexico, McClellan thought. These stark highlands were a beautiful place to be a tourist and an even better place to lend a helping hand to someone who really needed it.

Habitat for Humanity is an American-based nonprofit devoted to building affordable housing in partnership with people in need in the United States and around the world. “Knowing that people have a lot of needs—many are in extreme poverty and lack food, housing, education, all that—Habitat for Humanity stresses that the first thing that helps is housing, because it creates stability,” McClellan says. “Then you can worry about where your next meal is coming from, health, and education.”

This time it was the Lecheko family of the Ha-Mokuba village who needed help. Their crumbling hut of mud and stone had caved in while they slept—a wardrobe spared them by deflecting the avalanche of debris. Now they couldn’t afford to rebuild. McClellan and her husband, Ken, also a Lab employee, joined the Habitat for Humanity Lesotho Global Village Team to support the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Project and work a week on the Lecheko home. So did McClellan’s former co-worker, Nick Salazar and his wife, Janice.

At the Laboratory, Laura McClellan is a process improvement specialist in the Manager of Functions division office.

Addressing a world of needs

The Africa trip wasn’t McClellan’s first experience with Habitat for Humanity. Closer to home, working extensively with [Habitat for Humanity of Española Valley & Los Alamos](#), McClellan has helped build a couple of houses and worked on renovating several more through a new program she helped kick-start with a partnership between Habitat and her church, [Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church](#) in Los Alamos. Called “Building Kindness,” it offered basic renovation and repair work.

“We were building ramps for handicap access, shoring up floors that were caving in, repairing roofs, putting on a new front door,” she says. She then helped transition Building Kindness into a free-standing program called Somos Amigos.

The Habitat-related work harmonizes with another volunteer project close to McClellan's heart, though at first it seems unrelated: the Los Alamos Faith & Science Forum. The forum, which has run three consecutive summers since 2014 plus one winter session in 2015-2016, taps local speakers and brings in an invited speaker each summer to spark free-flowing discussions on the intersection of faith and science.

"We just formed a 501(c)(3) [nonprofit under IRS tax code] for the Forum," she says. "Now we're finalizing our membership rules, which we will announce soon. We have a lot of ideas about where we might go in the future. The highlight of our summer sessions are the small-group discussions where we stress trying on a new idea and walking in someone else's shoes to promote better understanding and discussions." Like Habitat, the forum gives McClellan a way to help others and to learn something new about new places, new people—and herself. "Both feed my desire to address needs in the world," she says.

[Read a longer version of this profile here.](#)

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