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Help needed for rebuilding Greensburg

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It may be as soon as the weather clears -- in April -- when some residents in Greensburg could see the first signs of a community self-help housing program.

In the meantime, officials with several local and state programs hope Kansans will step forward to donate materials, money and labor to help their Greensburg neighbors.

"We need your help," said Andy Bias, president and chief executive of Mennonite Housing during a news conference Monday afternoon. "We will need volunteer assistance during the building process. These families cannot do this alone. We need skilled and unskilled labor to expedite the building process."

At least 20 houses will be built in Greensburg under the program that promises affordable housing. Although the houses will be valued at \$100,000, officials hope to reduce the cost to \$40,000 using volunteer labor and donated or discounted materials.

"To be successful we will need the help of existing organizations coordinating volunteer efforts in Greensburg now," Bias said.

Ideally, Greensburg residents could receive loan assistance based on their income -- with interest rates as low as 1 to 3 percent. Monthly payments could be as low as \$300.

The 1,000-square-foot houses would have three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a full basement including a safe room, he said.

Bias said a partnership has been formed with the United Way of the Plains, USDA Rural Development and Mennonite Housing.

People who want to help build the houses in Greensburg or donate can call United Way's information line at 211 (toll free) or Mennonite Housing at 800-636-5242.

The housing would be "green with increased efficiency in materials and appliances."

"There is a need for affordable construction in Greensburg," said Chuck Banks, state director of the USDA Rural Development. "Housing is needed so jobs and businesses can recover."

A tornado May 4 wiped out more than 90 percent of the Kiowa County town.

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