

Times Argus

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.timesargus.com

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Jun 8, 2013

Home sweet home: Students build house for family

By [David Delcore](#)

Staff Writer

FAYSTON — He's still got a few weeks of work ahead of him, but Michael Witzel will soon be living the dream with his partner, Dana Applebaum, and their two young children.

Thanks to an innovative program launched by the Mad River Valley Housing Coalition and the hard work of some students at the Barre Technical Center, Witzel and his family are poised to move out of their mobile home in Waitsfield and into a new house in Fayston.

If you're looking for a man who feels like he won the lottery, look no farther than Witzel, who is a six-week siding job away from moving into a new two-story, three-bedroom, two-bath Cape-style home on 1.5 acres of prime real estate in the Mad River Valley.

That's right, Witzel is now a man with a \$140,000 mortgage, and if you think that's a typo, consider this: The cost of the land — a flat wooded parcel on German Flats Road — and the house — built by students in Steve Coultas' building trades class — account for less than half of what he and Applebaum borrowed.

"It was really an amazing deal," said Witzel, who credits Applebaum for a good bit of their family's good fortune.

It was Applebaum who noticed the Mad River Valley Housing Coalition had launched its Affordable Land Initiative and was fishing for families interested in acquiring a piece of property that Sugarbush owner Summit Ventures donated to get the program off the ground.

Applebaum said: "Let's apply."

Witzel said: "What do we have to lose?"

But the Mad River Valley Housing Coalition said "no" before it said "yes."

Another family was initially chosen after an interview process that was conducted more than a year ago. However, Witzel said they backed out.

"We got called back, and here we are," he said.

According to Witzel, it was housing coalition President John Donaldson who

suggested he go house hunting at the Barre Technical Center.

It was a year ago when Witzel first approached Coultas to learn more about his program and how he might go about buying one of the modular houses that Coultas' students build in five pieces for assembly off-site.

Based on that conversation, Witzel successfully bid for the house the students built this year. The price — \$57,000 — was right, and the house was trucked in pieces to Fayston this week and assembled on an energy-efficient foundation that Witzel, who works as the food and beverage manager at Mad River Glen, built last month with the help of ski school instructor Terry Barber.

Witzel said he paid as much for the foundation, mound system and well as he did for the property and the house.

Donaldson said finding a family for the subdivided sliver of Sugarbush property was a test case for the coalition's newest program.

"We really wanted to prove the concept," he said. "I think we've done that."

They did it by locating an income-eligible valley family and putting homeownership within their reach by selling the donated land at a fraction of its fair market value.

Donaldson said the coalition sold the property for what it cost to subdivide, gain permits and design a septic system for the lot — about \$6,000.

"It's a hell of a bargain," he said.

Based on the successful trial, Donaldson said the coalition is looking for additional tax-deductible land donations in the five towns it covers: Fayston, Warren, Waitsfield, Duxbury and Moretown.

Witzel, 40, is a believer. He said he is looking forward to moving into his new home with Applebaum and their sons, Harris, 3, and Oliver, 6 months.

"Everything just sort of came together perfectly," he said, describing the investment as too good to pass up.

"It's cheaper than a car, and it's got a washer and dryer," he joked.

david.delcore @timesargus.com
