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Habitat for Humanity welcomes its first group of volunteers in months on Wednesday. The crew from Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba was kept busy helping to build the non-profit's condo project on Templeton Avenue.

Habitat volunteers get back into swing of things

GABRIELLE PICHÉ

VOLUNTEERS began swinging hammers once more for Habitat for Humanity Manitoba, roughly three months after the non-profit organization normally gets its first volunteer crew of the year.

Thirty employees from Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba showed up around 8:30 a.m. Wednesday to work on a bare land condominium project on Templeton Avenue.

"By now, we would've had all the basements in the ground, and everybody would be framing," said Jason Miller, local director of program delivery. "Because of COVID, we've had a late start."

The non-profit's employees poured two basements last week. On Wednesday, volunteers worked on the basement, and scaffolding and building roofs.

Some wore face masks; all wore hard hats and boots that had been disinfected, as per novel coronavirus pandemic measures. The safety equipment would be disinfected at the end of the day, too, and put into a rotation, sitting for three or four days before their next use.

Volunteers worked with individually assigned tools and cleaned power tools before passing them to someone else. They filled out COVID-19 self-assessments before starting their work.

Normally, the two groups would visit the site in the same day; this summer, the local Habitat for Humanity isn't allowing groups over 30 people to volunteer at one time.

Even with the changes, it's good to be back to work, said Habitat Manitoba chief executive officer Sandy Hopkins.

"It's good to be on a build site, it's good to hear hammers going," he said. "The families who've been waiting patiently for this to happen... have to be feeling much better, as well."

The organization plans to build 12 homes in Manitoba this year: nine in Winnipeg, two in Brandon, and one in Selkirk. It's a change of plans from the

23 originally scheduled for 2020 (17 in Winnipeg). The pandemic resulted in a shortened build season, less fundraising because of cancelled events and lower-than-expected donations.

The Templeton Avenue condominium will hold 20 partner homes. The non-profit is building eight this year and the remaining 12 in 2021.

It marks the first time Habitat for Humanity Manitoba has built condos, but it has examples from affiliates in Toronto and Edmonton to refer to.

"This is not condominiums in the sense of most condo projects, where a developer imagines what the project will be and then tries to sell the units individually to people," Hopkins said.

"We've got our families lined up. We know who's going to want all these homes."

Families of four to eight will buy the units. They'll pay the market value of the house, condo fees, taxes and insurance. They won't pay interest on their mortgage for 15 years or a down payment, and their monthly instalments will be based on their income and ability to pay, Hopkins said.

Habitat is ready to change as the pandemic does, he said.

"If there's a need to slow down because of a resurgence of COVID, that's exactly what we'll do."

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NATURAL HABITAT

It's about three months later than in past years, but Habitat for Humanity is back. Volunteers have new pandemic measures they must follow, but 'it's good to hear hammers going,' Habitat CEO Sandy Hopkins says

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