

YOUTHBUILD USA

Young builders eyeing diploma

By Tarryl Jackson

tjackson@citpat.com -- 768-4941

Jackson resident Natasha Bennett never thought she would be able to build a house from start to finish.

"I'm not a construction kind of girl," said Bennett, 22. "I really stepped out of my comfort zone."

But thanks to collaborative community effort, Bennett and about 20 other young people from the area got a chance to build a home for a local needy family.

"It gives us a chance to help out the community," she said.

The project was part of YouthBuild U.S.A., a program in which people ages 16 to 24 work toward their high school diploma or GED (General Educational Diploma) while learning job skills and serving their community by building affordable housing.

The local chapter, sponsored by the Community Action Agency, partnered with Greater Jackson Habitat for Humanity and several other local organizations.

"It's a win-win for everyone involved," said Paul Burnham, the local YouthBuild program operations manager. "We're looking to expand our program and help more people."

A dedication ceremony for the house, which was built in Partnership Park, took place Wednesday and brought together about 30 community members.

"I'm very blessed with this whole situation," said Jackson resident Natasha Combs, who will live in the new home with her four children. "I'm just excited. I can't put it into words."

YouthBuild U.S.A. was founded in 1990 and has more than 200 programs nationwide, according to its Web site. Community- and faith-based nonprofit organizations sponsor most of

FRIDAY
JULY 17, 2009

JACKSON CITIZEN PATRIOT

Builders can earn a GED

Continued from A3

Get involved ...

the programs, although some are sponsored by public agencies. Primary support comes from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Over the past two years, the local YouthBuild chapter has had about 35 participants. The students work on one housing project throughout the school year.

"We expect them to work hard, and we give them the tools to succeed in the future," Burnham said.

Arthur Bates, 25, of Jackson said construction is something he has always liked to do.

The local YouthBuild program is accepting applications for the fall. For more information, contact Paul Burnham, YouthBuild program operations manager, at 788-6495 or pburnham@caajlh.org.

"It was a lot of work and lot of fun," said Bates, who recently attended Columbus High School to earn his GED. "We get to look at (the house) for years an years to come." *