

NEW ENGLAND CONSTRUCTION



GFM Enterprises Begins Brewster Affordable Housing Project

GFM Enterprises Starts Demolition, Clearing and Earthmoving for Cape Cod Habitat for Humanity

By Paul Fournier



As a John Deere 245 excavates side of hill, GFM's Jennifer Morris checks construction drawings on hood of one of company's service trucks.



The site of the abandoned Bassett's Wild Animal Farm in Brewster, Massachusetts, which delighted thousands of children and adult visitors alike during the 1980s through the early 2000s, will soon provide affordable housing for eligible needy families thanks to Habitat for Humanity (HFH) of Cape Cod.

Contractor GFM Enterprises of Harwich, Massachusetts, has a fleet of John Deere construction equipment at the landmark farm clearing trees and underbrush and tearing down old buildings including main exhibit halls, housing for some live-in employees and circular cage structures used for some of the larger animals.

Lions, Tigers and Bears

In its heyday, Bassett's Wild Animal Farm was a hugely popular attraction for Cape Cod visitors, who came to see an impressive private collection of animals from all over the world. Located on Tubman Road, off Route 124 in Brewster, the farm featured scores of wild animals housed along the area's scenic woodland paths, including a mountain lion, Bengal tiger, bears, lamas, foxes, deer, ocelot, monkeys, peacocks, kinkajou, coyotes, hawks, and owls, to name some. A special section of the attraction allowed children to feed and pet a number of tamer species, plus horse and pony rides and old-fashioned hay rides were available. The farm was reportedly closed sometime around 2002.

Soaring Housing Prices

The Town of Brewster, located in Barnstable County, has seen housing prices skyrocket in the last two decades. A semi-rural community located on the inside of the Cape Cod "elbow," Brewster has great natural resources including 6 miles of coastline, more than 300 acres of beaches and marshlands and numerous large ponds – all serv-

ing to attract second-home buyers, retirees and more than 30,000 summer visitors each year. Add to this the fact that at least one-third of the town's land area is earmarked for conservation, watershed protection, open space, and recreation, and the result is soaring land values for the remaining developable land. Thus home prices are now among the highest on Cape Cod, and the town has been proactively seeking ways to create more affordable housing.

Dovetailing with strategies to increase affordable housing is the current project of Habitat for Humanity of Cape Cod, one of 14 HFH affiliates in Massachusetts. Brewster's project is the latest to be launched by this affiliate which has built homes in all 15 towns on Cape Cod, and completed its 100th home this year.

Young Company Run By Construction Veterans

Site contractor GFM Enterprises, recently certified by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a woman-owned business, is run by long time Cape Cod residents Jennifer Morris, CEO, and husband Gregory F. Morris, President. The Morris' each had years of experience in the construction industry before establishing GFM in 2005 – Jennifer grew up in the industry, had attended business school and owned her own rental business on the Outer Cape, while Gregory had years of experience working in the industry on the Outer Cape.

The Harwich-based company employs 18 full-time year-round employees and performs work Cape-wide for both commercial and residential clients. This involves a wide variety of projects, from licensed septic installation/upgrades, foundations, structure demolition, house lifting, and cellar holes, to road grading, building erosion fences and constructing seawalls, among others.



A John Deere 524 Loader stockpiles stripped loam to be used later for housing site landscaping.



GFM worker tamps backfill around valve for new water main.



John Deere 650 Dozer and 245G Excavator clear right-of-way for access road into new affordable housing site.

Project Scope of Work

While the total acreage of the HFH site hasn't been reported, it is large enough to allow 14 ample-sized single-family homes to be built once GFM's initial work is done. Its present contract with HFH calls for constructing a 1,800-foot, 25-foot-wide roadway, in addition to demolition, clearing and excavating for the first seven homes to be built. Related work consists

of installing 1,800 feet of 8-inch ductile iron water main, putting in drainage systems including 12-inch ADS pipe and catch basins, and constructing individual septic systems and leach pits.

All of the contractor's construction machines on the job site are John Deere equipment, including a 28-ton 245 excavator, 650 dozer, 524 loader, and a 333 skid steer. Occasionally, the contractor

uses a smaller excavator, a 16-ton John Deere 135, to help out at the site. Many trees have had to be cleared for the road construction, with workers cutting them down using chain saws, then employing excavators equipped with hydraulic thumb buckets to load them on trucks for disposal. The Harwich contractor has two Peterbilt tractor trailers and a Peterbilt tri-axle dump truck working the site.

Loam is being stripped and stockpiled for later use in landscaping the home sites. In general, GFM recycles as much excavated material as possible on all of its jobs. This includes loam and asphalt pavement, which are crushed and screened and either reused on the active job site or stockpiled at their gravel pits for use on other projects. None of the materials is offered for sale.

Not a Giveaway Housing Program

Habitat for Humanity of Cape Cod is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International. Affiliates of HFH are community-level organizations that build, renovate and repair houses in their local areas to provide decent, affordable housing for families in need. Established in Americus, Georgia, U.S., in 1976, HFH today operates

in nearly 1,400 communities across the U.S., and in more than 70 countries worldwide and has helped build, renovate and repair more than 600,000 decent affordable houses sheltering more than 3 million people around the world.

HFH is not a give-away program. Its partner families buy the houses while HFH makes no profit on the sale. In the United States, Habitat homeowners purchase their houses through affordable monthly mortgage payments. Each local affiliate's family selection committee chooses Habitat homeowners based on three criteria: the family's level of need; their willingness to become partners in the program by investing hundreds of hours of their own labor (sweat equity) working alongside volunteers and other Habitat home owners; and their ability to repay the loan through an affordable payment plan.

And while HFH is a Christian housing ministry, every affiliate must follow a non-discriminatory policy of family selection. Neither race nor religion can be a factor in choosing Habitat's homeowner families. Furthermore, its non-proselytizing policy prohibits working with entities or individuals who insist on proselytizing as part of their work with HFH.



Jennifer Morris, CEO, and Gregory Morris, President, established GFM Enterprises 10 years ago. Commonwealth of Massachusetts recently certified the company as a woman-owned business.