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BUSINESS

Hancock in effort to boost Boston housing; Professional women would volunteer

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BOSTON - John Hancock Financial Services is helping launch a yearlong effort to bring as many as 500 professional women into the community to work on affordable housing projects in Boston.

The South Boston insurer has pledged to give \$50,000 as the lead sponsor of the "500 Women & Youth Build" project. The project was to be unveiled at a brownstone renovation project in the South End today.

Carol Fulp, vice president of community relations for John Hancock, is spearheading the initiative with Angela Menino, Mayor Tom Menino's wife, and Diane Patrick, Gov. Deval Patrick's wife. The effort is an extension of a volunteer trip that the three of them took, along with more than 30 other women, to New Orleans in May to help build affordable housing for musicians.

"We decided when we got back, we wanted to continue the efforts at home," Fulp said. "When we came back, so many women said, 'I'd love to be a part of an effort like this.'"

Fulp contacted YouthBuild Boston, a Roxbury nonprofit organization that provides Boston youths with opportunities to do construction work. Fulp said her group wants to ensure as many as 500 women can volunteer on housing projects in Boston over the next year, working with YouthBuild crews.

That number far exceeded the typical volunteer levels handled by YouthBuild in the past.

"It was a scope that was larger than we had been considering, but it was a good surprise," said Garrett Butler-Hall, director of development for YouthBuild Boston. "We ... figured out a way to make it work because it was something we really wanted to be part of."

Companies can sponsor projects by agreeing to contribute at least \$5,000. Volunteers can either come from companies who donate to a project, such as John Hancock, or from nonprofit groups that are sponsored by those companies. Liberty Mutual and Bank of New York Mellon are among the companies that have agreed to be sponsors, Fulp said.

Other upcoming projects include building a duplex in Mattapan and weatherizing homes of low-income elderly residents.

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