

**Safer Saws Transform  
Chatham Habitat  
Construction Projects**  
*Only four Habitat affiliates  
nationwide own innovative  
saws with built-in skin sensors*

CHATHAM COUNTY - Imagine you are volunteering on a Habitat for Humanity construction site, helping build a home with a family in need. You pick up a piece of plywood, turn on the table saw, and begin cutting the wood into the calculated dimensions. You carefully push it through the spinning blade and then you are distracted by something - a loud noise, another volunteer, or even something as small as a sneeze. That two seconds, however, is all the time it takes to lose a finger with a traditional table saw.



L to R: Chatham Board President Dick Forbis, Construction Site Manager Jack Heuer, and volunteer Page Richardson, who donated the saws.

But long-time volunteer Page Richardson recently took steps to make certain such an accident never happens on a Chatham Habitat for Humanity construction site.

She donated two new SawStop table saws to the organization, making it among the first Habitat for Humanity affiliates nationwide to own the "Rolls Royce of table saws." The only other affiliates are in Atlanta, Ga.; San Antonio, Texas; and Portland, Ore.

What makes them unique are built-in sensors that shut down the rapidly spinning blades within five milliseconds after they detect skin. Woodworkers who slip up are left only with the equivalent of a paper cut.

"Page has always been very safety-minded," said Chatham Habitat Construction Site Manager Jack Heuer. "When she offered us a grant to replace our existing stock of table saws with new safe SawStops, her only condition was that when the SawStops came in,

we'd have to get rid of all the old ones."

Richardson first learned about the innovative SawStops while listening to National Public Radio and immediately decided it would be a "great investment for Habitat." She took action after fellow volunteer and Chatham Habitat Board President Dick Forbis had a close encounter with a traditional table saw. "I was very fortunate - it only nicked me - but it got us thinking. Sometimes the only way people learn is after something tragic happens, and we didn't want to wait for that," said Forbis.

But first, switching to the new saws required an okay from the construction committee at Chatham Habitat. The deliberation did not last long, Heuer said. "The decision was a no brainer." The grant from Richardson also funded a cart to move the saws around the construction site and several extra brakes and blades, which must be replaced after an emergency shut-off.

"Even if it never actually stops and we never need that safety feature, it's the fact that it's there if we ever do," said Richardson, adding with a light-hearted giggle: "it's like a great insurance policy."

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The SawStop's creater boldly demonstrates its shut-off safety feature with his own finger: [video](#)

### **About Chatham Habitat for Humanity**

*Everyone in our community deserves a safe, decent place to live. Since 1989, we have worked to change substandard housing conditions throughout Chatham County by making homeownership possible for more than 100 families. We accomplish this by creating partnerships between families in need and hundreds of volunteers and donors. Together we transform lives, improve neighborhoods, and most importantly give hope and strength to our communities.*

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**Building houses,  
Building hope.**



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