Hand him the keys: SOAD’s tiny house project dedicated to August 2016 flood victim

Regan Conner
regannconner@gmail.com

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette School of Architecture and Design, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity and Upbring Disaster Response, built a tiny house for a community member who lost their home in 2016 August flood event.

On Wednesday, Oct. 18, about 50 people of all ages came together to celebrate the ModesteHouse during the dedication ceremony outside of Joel L. Fletcher Hall.

The ModesteHouse is 216 square feet, including a porch and loft, and displays other features such as propane water heating, a composting toilet and a 20-feet-by-10-feet storage wall. The tiny house was designed as part of a study and as a response to the August 2016 flooding.

“It started first as more of a research project to study living in small spaces and how comfortable you can make small spaces,” explained Geoff Gjertson, UL architecture professor. “I think we all need to start thinking about a smaller footprint and one way is to actually live smaller.”

The ModesteHouse took about eight months to complete with two classes and an additional 20 students working on it. The work started during last spring semester and lasted throughout the summer.

“It feels good to be able to give it to someone that was in need and having it go to someone in the community is really important,” said Alexandra Carr, a graduate student at UL Lafayette and team leader for the project.

Numerous sponsors donated materials or time to build the tiny home. Financial support came from different foundations and anonymous donors.

“What a great outreach this is for the School of Architecture and Design, it’s a great way to collaborate with the community,” said Thomas Sammons, the SOAD director.

The School of Architecture and Design, Upbring Disaster Response, and Lafayette Habitat for Humanity were the main partners in getting the ModesteHouse built, finding a recipient and helping the recipient get the house to its final location.

According to the National Weather Service an estimated 50,000 to 75,000 structures flooded during the August 2016 floods. One of these structures was Ronney Segura’s home.

Segura’s trailer in New Iberia flooded and was no longer safe to live in. His case worker from Upbring Disaster Response, Candace Raymond, said the decision on who would receive the ModesteHouse was based on many different factors, and Segura was the best match.

Melinda Taylor, the executive director of Lafayette Habitat for Humanity, explained that this will be a continued partnership. Now that Segura has the house, the tiny home still needs to be moved to Bayou Jack in New Iberia, and Habitat for Humanity is going to help with moving and preparing the land.

Asked how he felt about receiving the home, Segura exclaimed: “Awesome! It’s just been a long road for me.”

During the ceremony, Segura was given a tiny bible and the keys to the house, and was finally allowed to see his new home.