

Housing ministry continues work on Montgomery's west side



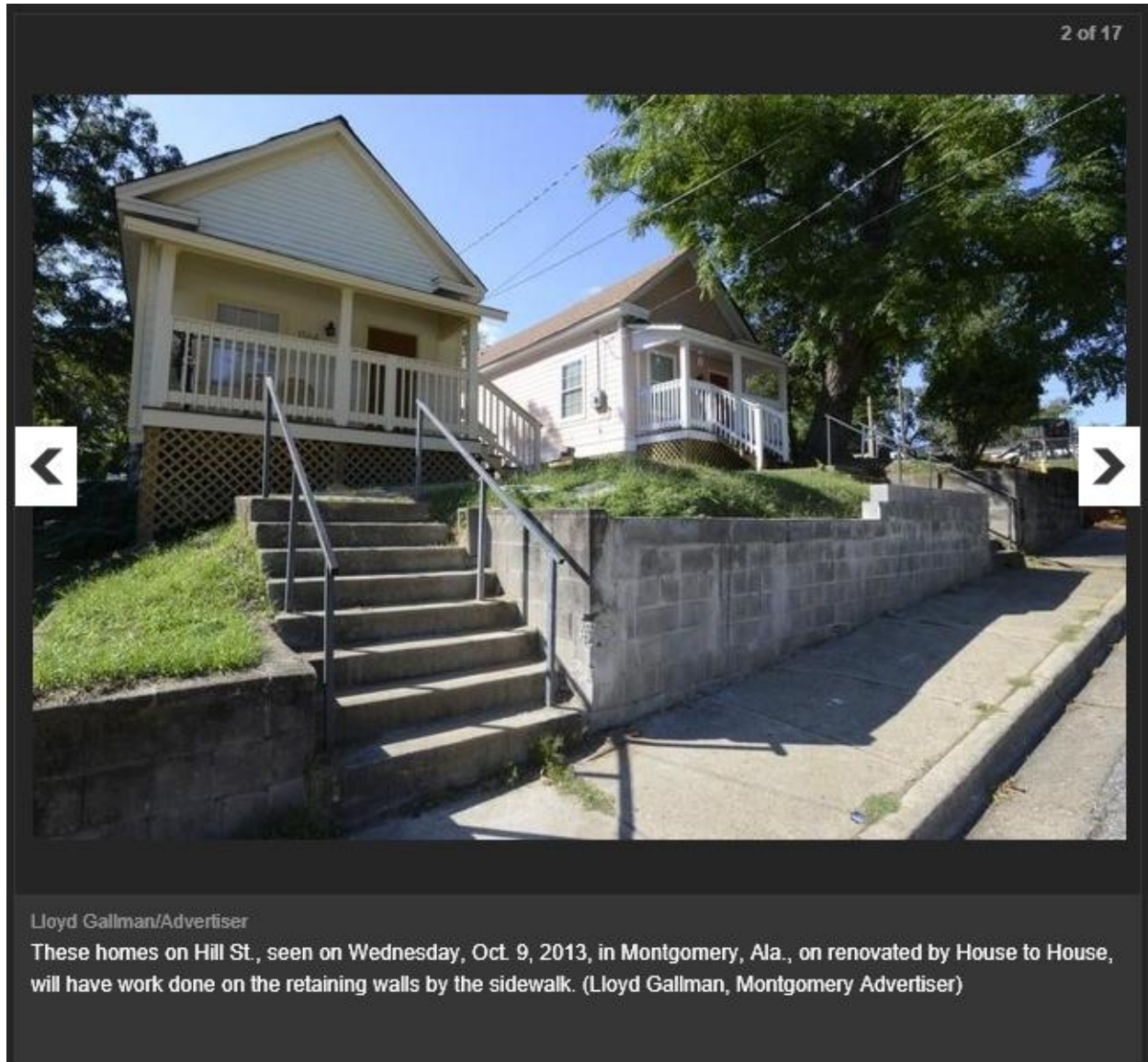
The relationships are building slowly in this west side neighborhood that has for decades been “under-resourced,” to use one description.

But two Christian ministries are constantly at work here — opening doors, relieving blight, gaining trust.

One group that’s working to address a pressing need is the nonprofit House to House, a mentoring ministry that puts people who live in Washington Park into safe, comfortable,

affordable homes, while teaching them to be financially literate and good stewards of money and property.

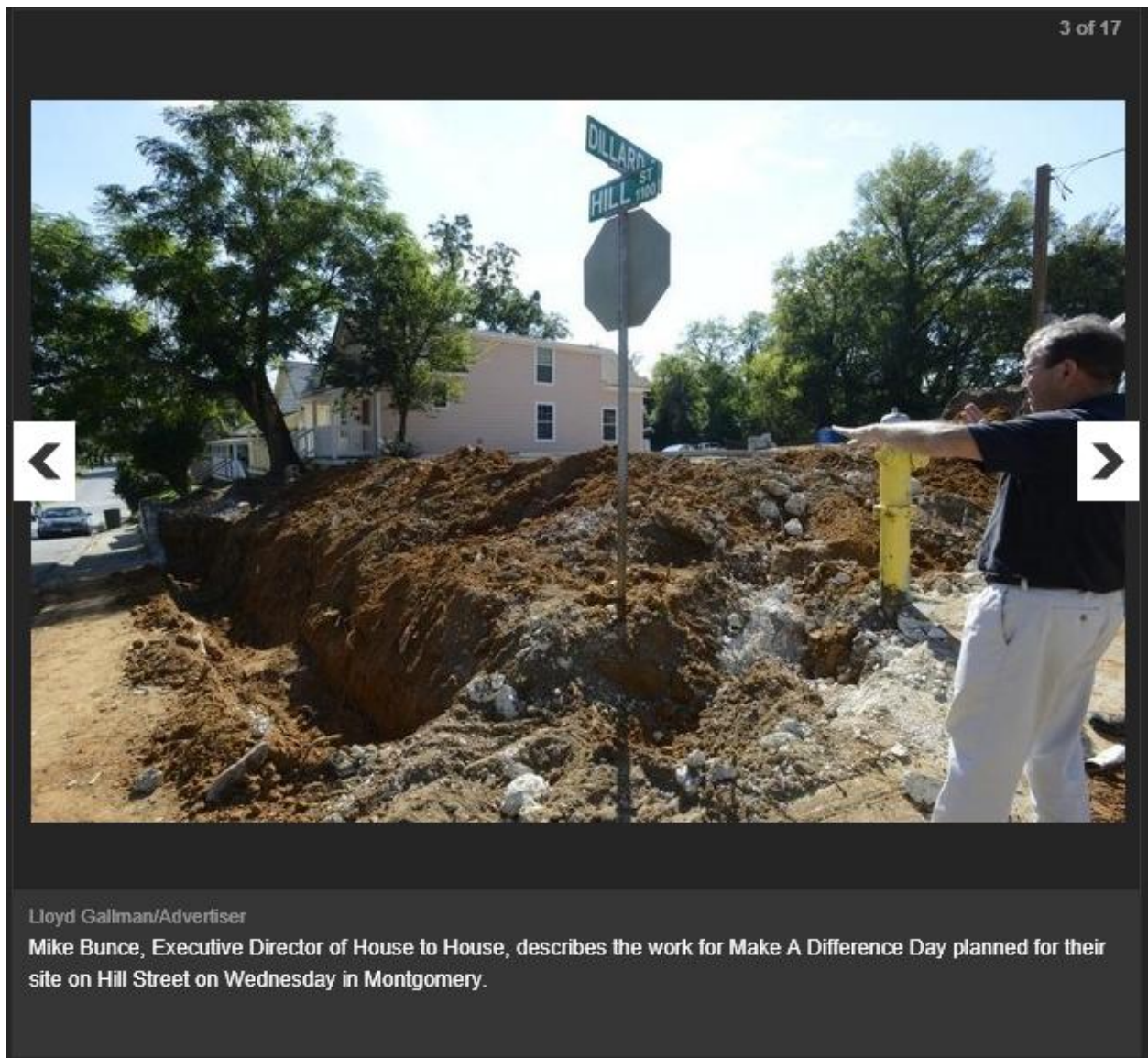
And, staffers hope, sharing the love of Jesus Christ at the same time.



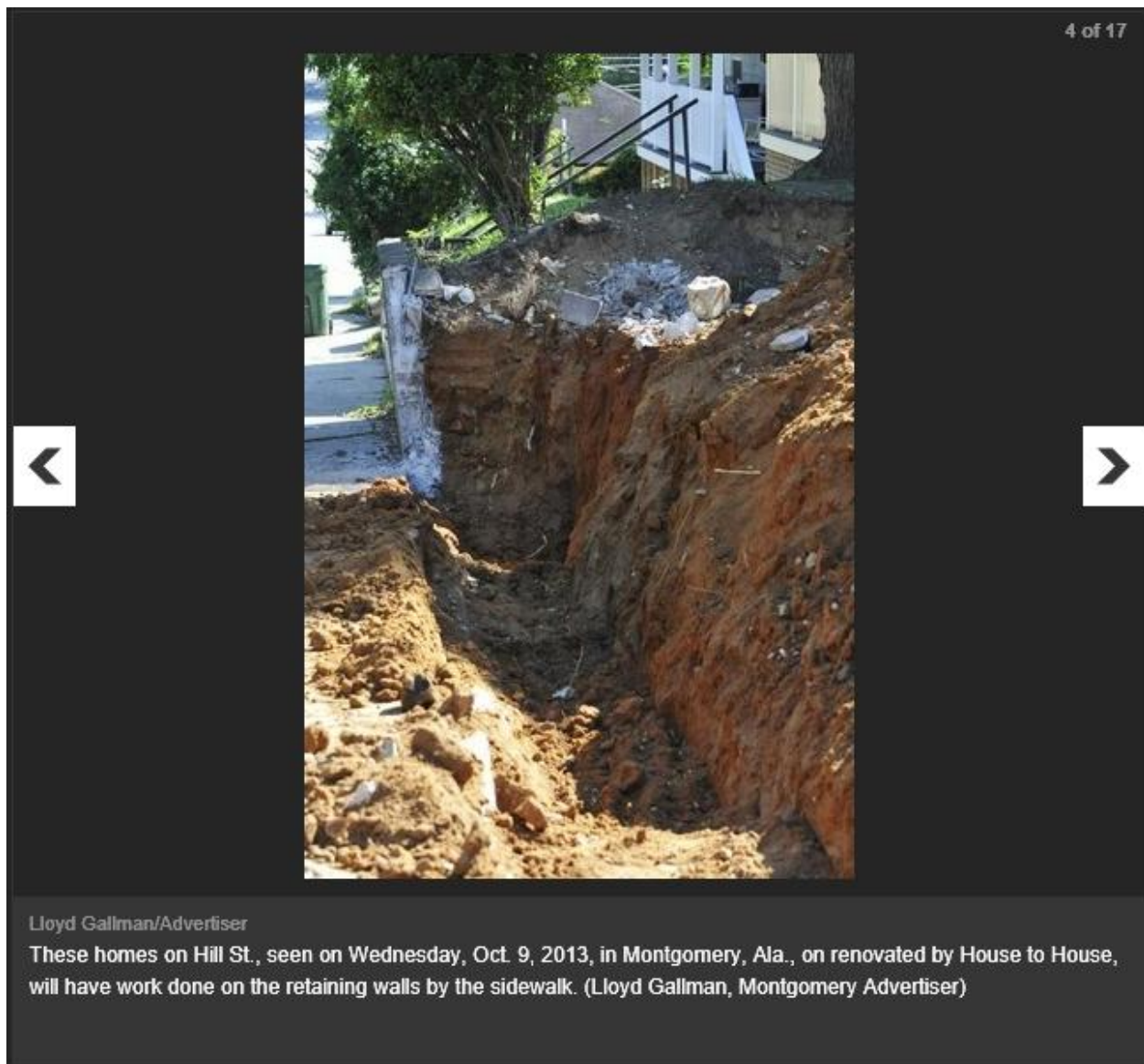
House to House is now under construction with its 17th house. Since 2011, when it became separate from the older, more established Common Ground ministry, executive director Mike Bunce and his staff have worked to build relationships not just with the people who live in this neighborhood, but with the larger Montgomery community as well.

As a part of that outreach, House to House is calling for volunteers to help Oct. 26, which is the national Make A Difference Day (MADD), when millions of volunteers around the world unite in a common mission to improve the lives of others. The *Montgomery Advertiser* is for the second year hosting a MADD event that day with House to House, and everyone is welcome to help.

“It’s not about making a difference one day,” *Advertiser* president and publisher Robert Granfeldt said on a recent tour of the neighborhood. “It’s about making a difference every day.”



The project is an extension of last year's work, when dozens of volunteers worked on interior demolitions, exterior painting and caulking, and cleaning and recycling old bricks at three homes on Hill Street. This year, volunteers will help replace a failing retaining wall in front of those three homes, which are now completely renovated and inhabited. Volunteers also could be doing some demolition and scraping and painting on a house up the street that's just now undergoing renovation.

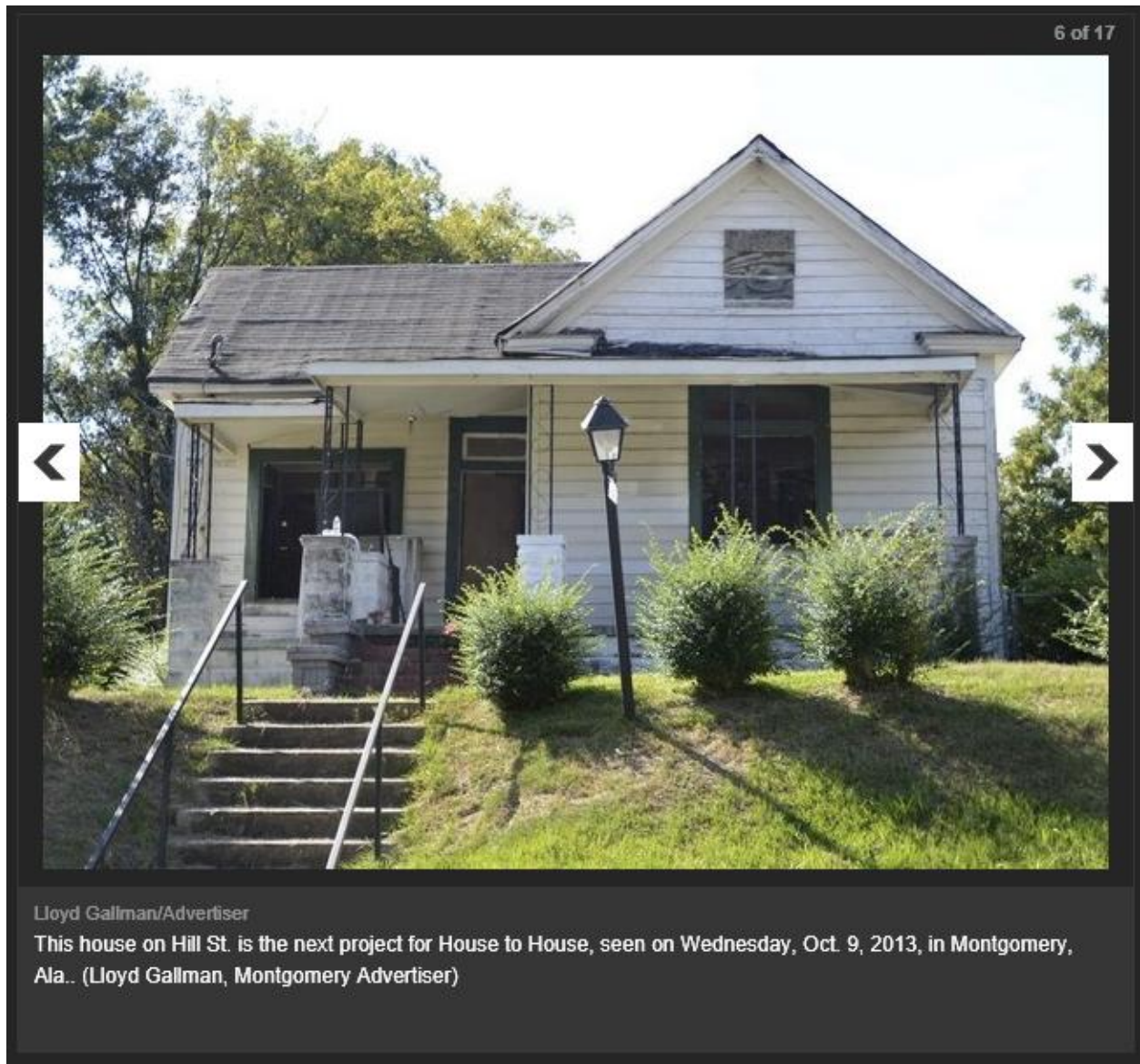


Bunce said they knew the retaining wall would be an expensive project, one that House to House wouldn't normally tackle. A grant from the Gannett Foundation (Gannett is the *Advertiser's* corporate parent) will pay for the materials, and there will be the many hands needed to move, stack and level the decorative wall blocks.

Such partnerships make those projects doable, Bunce said, “and it doesn’t add to the cost of the houses. It does add to the beauty and livability of the neighborhood.”

Teaching life skills

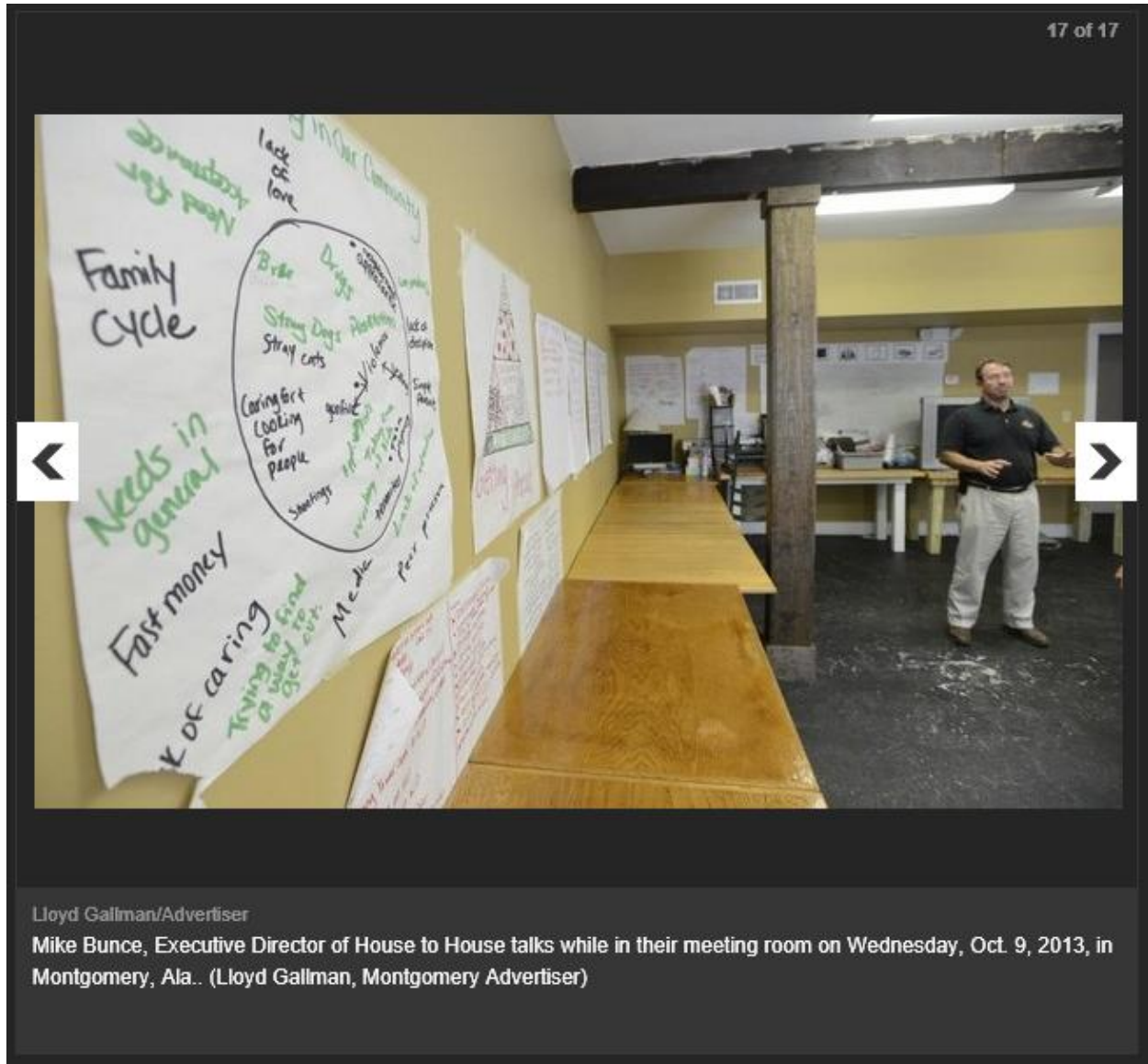
The most visible, tangible part of House to House is, of course, the homes themselves. The ministry purchases dilapidated homes and completely renovates them, using the help of volunteers and ministry friends.



Investor partners from the community allow their money to be used for purchase and renovation work. The partners are paid back with rent money, which House to House

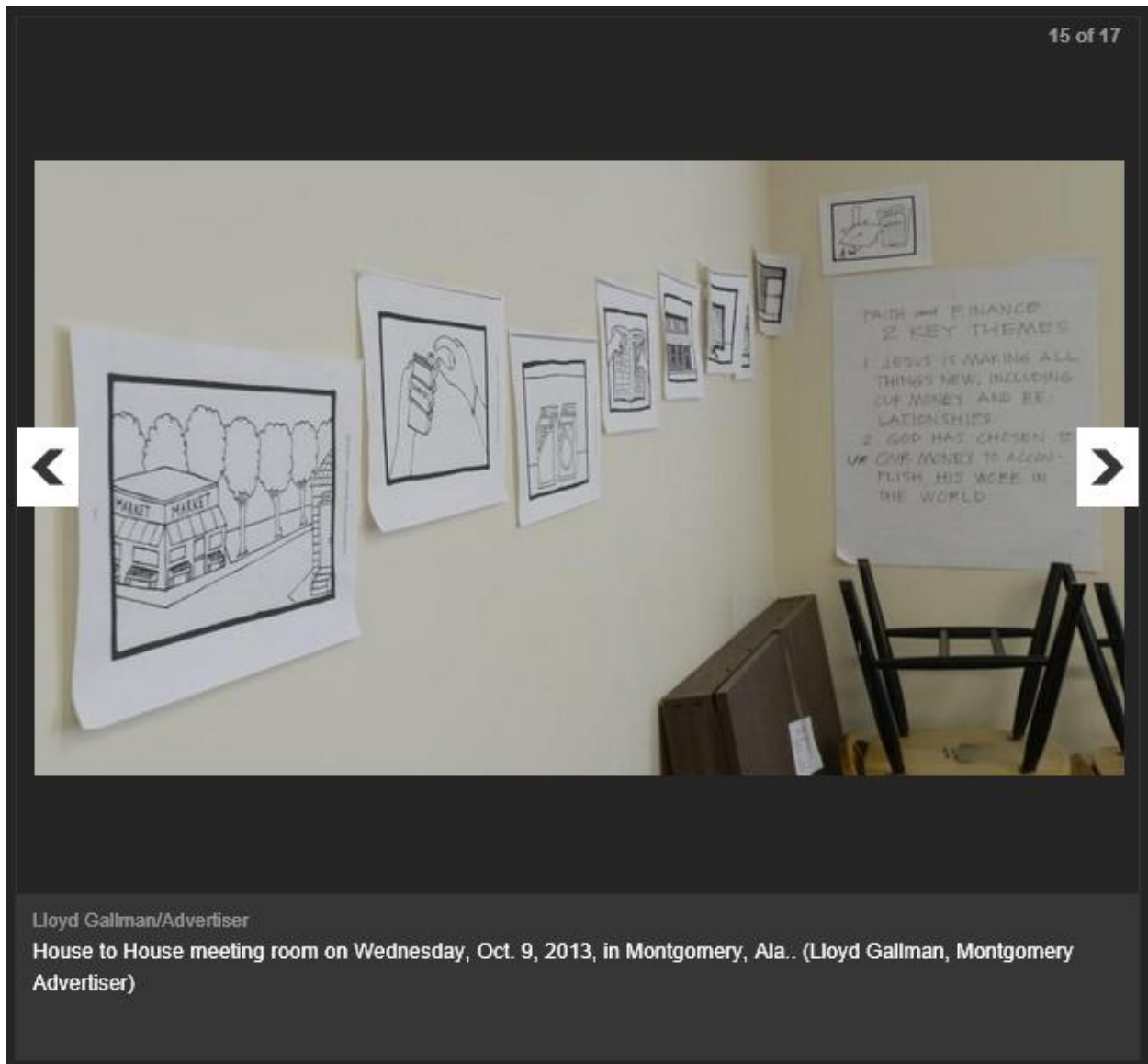
collects from qualified tenants, many of whom are from the Washington Park neighborhood.

To ensure that the tenants stay afloat, House to House requires them to complete a 50-week course that teaches them financial literacy, life and relationship skills, job skills and Christian principles. Classes are taught by House to House staffers as well as local ministers and others from the community with expertise in certain areas.



The last class had about a 50 percent rate of completion. Six heads of household completed the course, and five of those six are in their renovated homes now; the last one is waiting for House to House to finish work on a four-bedroom home.

The current class is now in its fourth week and is larger than the last. Bunce said the class coordinator sees positive indications that this group is more committed than the last, and less likely to drop out.



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

House to House meeting room on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala.. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)

'Creating community'

One of House to House's success stories is a woman who lived in a rental nearby on Stella Street. Now she's in a renovated home on Hill Street and pays about \$100 less in rent; her heating bills are about a third of what they were.

The woman has health challenges and doesn't have a car, but she never misses a day of work at a local restaurant, Bunce said; her wages, plus a small amount of government assistance, pay her bills. Her son lives with her and is going to college.

Because she was part of the mentoring class, she got to know the staff as well as other families in the neighborhood. She now has more resources that she can fall back on, Bunce said.

"I like to think of that as some of the most exciting success stories that we have," he said. "We're creating community."

Building trust

The staff of House to House and Common Ground are encouraged to live in the neighborhood, which helps them engage in life-on-life ministry.

For some, that's a leap of faith. But that's at the heart of the ministry.

It's one of the most effective ways, they've found, to help the communities and themselves. It's also a very real way to demonstrate their commitment to the neighborhood and build trust among the neighbors, who initially were wary of outsiders.

Slowly, it's happening, Bunce said. He points to the neighborhood churches that are starting to reach out to House to House and Common Ground, which in turn get involved with the churches' projects.

"It's almost hard to find somebody in the neighborhood who doesn't know who we are," Bunce said. "There's still a very small minority who still think, there's got to be a catch. They don't trust it."

But the clean, safe homes are hard not to notice.

"As more and more people start to live in the houses, it kind of proves that what we're doing is real," Bunce said.

Jobs, and a vision

Long term, Bunce has many ideas — and needs — for House to House. Creating economic development, and local jobs, is one of the goals.

Bunce hopes that a partnership with the city on the revitalization of the Oak Street corridor will help. Oak Street runs right through the Washington Park neighborhood, and one leg of the Selma-to-Montgomery 50th anniversary-commemorative march will come right along Oak Street in 2015.

The city has invested \$100,000 in a master plan for Oak Street, Bunce said, and is waiting for private investors to come on board.

Bunce would like for House to House to help bring in businesses as part of that master plan — retail shops, while sorely needed, might hire one or two workers. His hope is that some kind of light industrial companies also would locate there and hire many people from the neighborhood.

Another long-range goal is for House to House to become self-supporting, and to have churches and groups partner to provide the cash to fix up the houses. Now, the money for renovations comes from the loans from the investor partners. Using donated money would allow House to House to operate without debt.

That, in turn, would allow House to House to use the rent payments it collects to go back into the administrative needs of the ministry. Like many nonprofits, House to House faces constant pressures in fundraising.

That, like many other obstacles in this kind of work, requires faith in God, Bunce said.

“It’s been a personal lesson to me that it’s not about me or my fundraising ability,” he said. “This is God’s vision for this neighborhood, and he’s going to make sure we’ve got what we need to keep going.”



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

These homes on Hill St., seen on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala., on renovated by House to House, will have work done on the retaining walls by the sidewalk. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

These homes on Hill St., seen on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala., are being renovated by House to House, and will have work done on the retaining walls by the sidewalk. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

Mike Bunce, Executive Director of House to House, talks while in their next project house on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala.. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

Inside the next House to House project house on Hill St., on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala.. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)



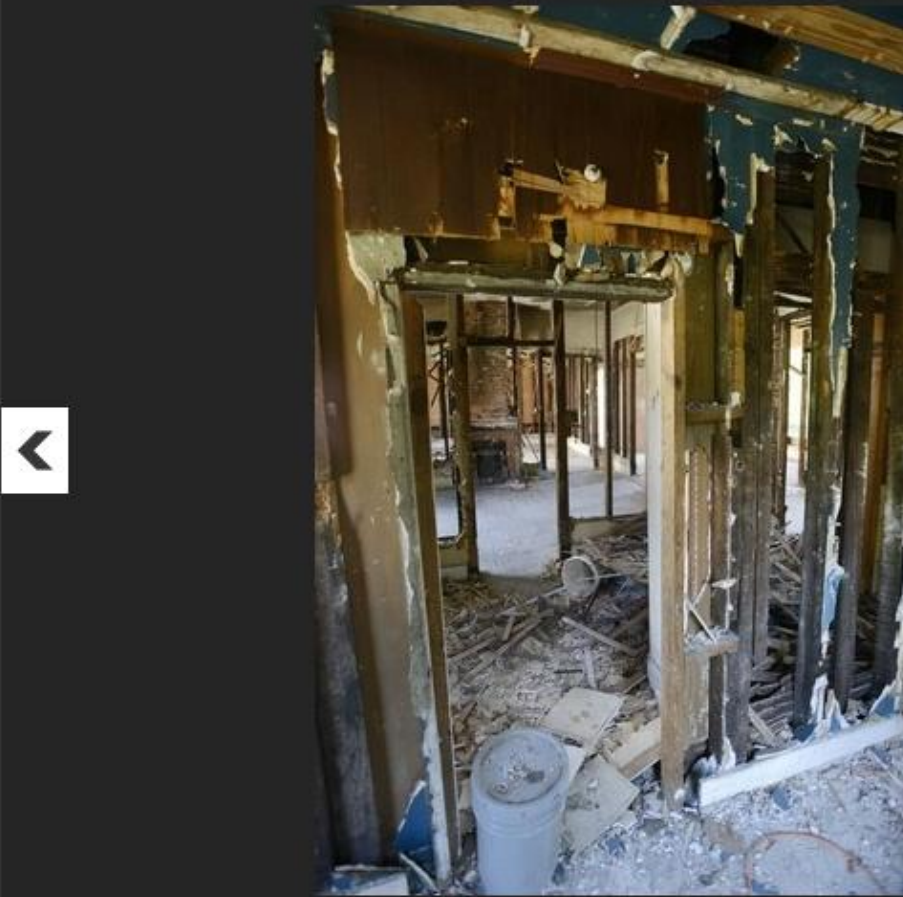
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Site on Hill Street on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala., where House to House will be building a house. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

Mike Bunce, Executive Director of House to House talks while at their office on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala.. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)



Lloyd Gallman/Advertiser

Mike Bunce, Executive Director of House to House talks while in their meeting room on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2013, in Montgomery, Ala.. (Lloyd Gallman, Montgomery Advertiser)

Montgomery Advertiser SUNDAY



MAKING A DIFFERENCE This is God's vision for this neighborhood, and he's going to make sure we've got what we need to keep going.



Mike Bunch, executive director of the Montgomery Housing Ministry, stands on the site of the new housing development in the Westside neighborhood.

Work continues

Housing ministry focuses on west side

Construction work continues on the Westside neighborhood in Montgomery. The housing ministry is focused on providing affordable housing for the community.

Talks shift from House to Senate

White House relays GOP-led House to sidelines in negotiations

David Igoe and Alan Tran

WASHINGTON — Republicans and Democrats in Congress failed to make any significant progress toward a deal Saturday on a controversial budget bill.

House Speaker John Boehner said the House will continue to work on the budget bill, but the White House is pushing for a deal to be reached by the end of the month.



Sen. Mark Warner, R-Va., speaks at a news conference in Washington.

Sen. Mark Warner, R-Va., says he is optimistic about the budget negotiations.

Warner says he is confident that a deal can be reached by the end of the month.

Fees would affect popular events

Prattville may charge for police at fundraisers

Prattville, Ala., is considering a new fee structure for police services at fundraisers. The city council is expected to vote on the proposal.

ESTATE JEWELRY 75% OFF



Marquette's ESTATE JEWELRY 75% OFF. The sale includes a wide variety of jewelry items.

Housing

Montgomery Housing Ministry focuses on west side

The Montgomery Housing Ministry is focused on providing affordable housing for the Westside neighborhood. The ministry is currently working on several projects.

The ministry is currently working on several projects in the Westside neighborhood. The projects include the construction of new housing units.



Montgomery Housing Ministry officials meet with community members.

Officials from the ministry are meeting with community members to discuss housing needs.

The ministry is committed to providing affordable housing for all members of the community.

Fees

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Prattville, Ala., is considering a new fee structure for police services at fundraisers. The city council is expected to vote on the proposal.

The city council is expected to vote on the proposal for a new fee structure for police services at fundraisers.

The proposal would allow the city to charge a fee for police services at fundraisers.

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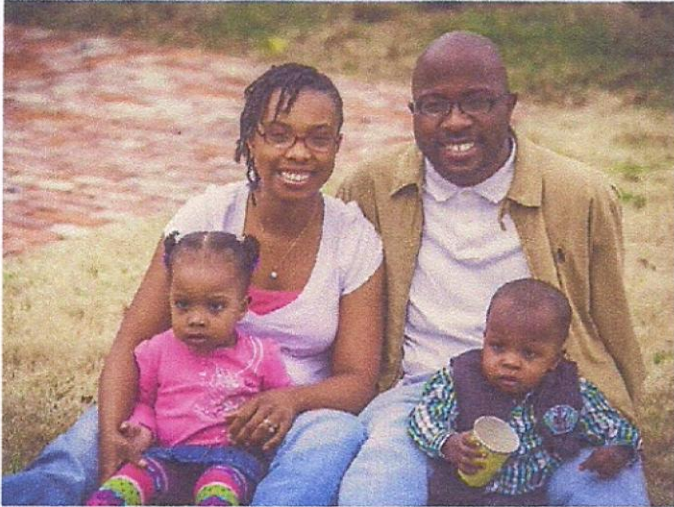
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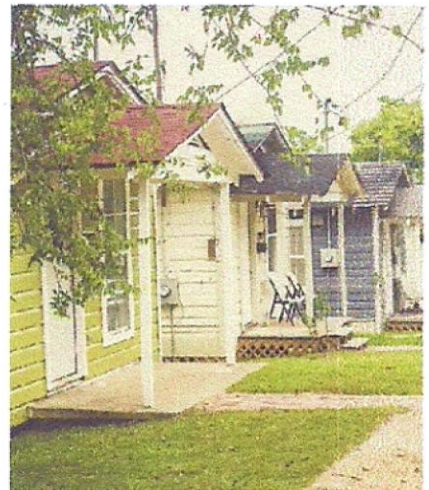
Acts 5:42

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