

# Habitat Times

Building Homes, Building Community, Building Common Ground



HABITAT FOR HUMANITY  
NEW YORK CITY

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## Building a Dream for Six Families in Queens Habitat-NYC Breaks Ground on New Homes in Jamaica

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The St. Louis family is one step closer to making their dream come true.

In mid-June, Emmanuel and Nancy St. Louis helped to break ground on their new home in Jamaica, Queens, one of six that Habitat-NYC plans to build in the neighborhood.

The couple has four young children, ages 2 to 9, and a new infant, born just days after the ground-breaking. All seven family members currently live in a makeshift two-bedroom apartment in the basement of Nancy St. Louis's sister's house in Queens Village. Before learning about Habitat-NYC, the couple spent six years attempting to move into a home of their own, but were unable to find a space they could afford. "Housing costs just caught us by surprise. Every year we accumulated money, but the costs would always be more," Mr. St. Louis said. "I kept getting better jobs with more pay, but it kept slipping out of our

fingers because of the cost of housing."

Mr. St. Louis said the new home will provide his family with a healthier environment, more room for his children to grow and learn and a backyard in which to play. For Ms. St. Louis, who spent three to four hours every day on the internet searching for a new home for her family, the prospect of moving into their own home carries a major sense of accomplishment. "It's a miracle," she says. "I thank God for Habitat."

Habitat-NYC has already built 18 homes in Jamaica the six new homes will raise the neighborhood total to 24.

"By providing new, affordable homes, Habitat-NYC is providing a critical contribution to this community," said Queens Borough President Helen Marshall. "Here in

[continued on page 2]



Yael St. Louis smiles in front of the site where her new home will be built.



Queens Borough President Helen Marshall and Habitat-NYC staff, volunteers and funders welcome the St. Louis family to Jamaica.

Photo: Elizabeth Powell

## The Advocate's Toolkit: Habitat-NYC Drafts New Housing Covenant

Unlike so many other policy documents that get released with much fanfare and then gather dust on politicians' shelves, the Habitat-NYC Housing Covenant is designed to be a living document and critical organizing tool for Habitat-NYC's new advocacy program. Habitat-NYC created the covenant as part of an open dialogue with many of the best minds in the New York affordable housing and faith community.

The 25-member Covenant Advisory Committee reviewed

several drafts of the document and gave critical feedback at two breakfast meetings. The strong feeling among Committee members was that the document needed to be a moral manifesto and call to action that would speak to the hearts and minds of the thousands of volunteers, family partners and donors that have made Habitat-NYC such a beloved organization.

Habitat-NYC took up the challenge of creating a living document by identifying five bold goals. continued on page 2

# A Covenant Built on Faith

## Groundbreaking continued from page 1



Habitat for Humanity stands for the simple proposition that all people deserve decent, affordable shelter. Everyday across the world, thousands of volunteers manifest God's love by rolling up their sleeves and building homes alongside the families that will live in them—more than 170,000 homes built on a foundation of love and justice. But it is not enough. The homes that Habitat builds are a part of the solution, not the solution.

The struggle to create simple, decent housing for all New Yorkers will be a long one. The prize is clear—building 250,000 homes will end homelessness in New York, ensure that our teachers, firefighters and police officers can live in our city and give young families an opportunity to achieve the American dream in New York. Habitat-NYC's special contribution is our ability to engage so many people. Thousands of volunteers from hundreds of faith institutions, businesses and civic organizations build with us every year, and millions of people read about and see our work in newspapers and on TV. Our power to reach so many people provides the foundation of Habitat-NYC's new advocacy initiative.

Advocacy will take many forms for Habitat-NYC. Our family partners—Habitat-NYC's best and most effective spokespeople—remind us that for every American dream we are able to fulfill, hundreds of thousands more families continue to languish in substandard, overcrowded housing conditions. Our faith partners work to make real the scriptural edict for social justice by volunteering with Habitat-NYC and speaking out for more affordable housing. The centerpiece of our advocacy efforts is the Habitat-NYC Housing Covenant. This is a policy document created by some of New York's best thinkers and most prominent advocates in the housing field. The Housing Covenant outlines a number of key practical steps that will create more and better housing for New Yorkers. Kevin Sullivan, Habitat-NYC's director of advocacy, describes the Covenant in detail on page 1 of this newsletter.

Habitat for Humanity already has a profound housing covenant—to build simple, decent affordable housing with volunteers and our family partners. We will continue to do this to the best of our ability in greater and greater numbers. The Habitat-NYC Housing Covenant adds to that beautiful work by encouraging all who support us to contribute their energy to the housing marathon. Habitat-NYC can serve the important function of bringing people who care about New York's housing challenge to the starting line and sending them off and running. To reach the finish line, it will take the united effort of all New Yorkers, from the private and public sector, the faith community and the business community, schools, community organizations and unions. It is Habitat-NYC's intention to create a city where housing justice is a reality, by building affordable homes and winning hearts and minds with effective advocacy.

Roland Lewis, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity - New York City

Roland Lewis, executive director of Habitat-NYC, said that the groundbreaking ceremony marked a homecoming for Habit-NYC. "We have made a major, long-term commitment to Jamaica," Mr. Lewis said. "It is especially meaningful to build on our success in a neighborhood where we have such close ties and in a community that has such a dire need for affordable homes."

## Covenant continued from page 1

ture the sense of hope and possibility that Habitat-NYC embodies. The five goals of the Covenant are to:

- End Homelessness
- Build Decent, Affordable Homes for all New Yorkers
- Expand Homeownership
- End Housing Discrimination
- Build Healthy, Sustainable Homes and Neighborhoods

For each of these broad challenges Habitat-NYC identified five policy priorities and action items. The goal was to align Habitat-NYC with other housing and advocacy groups to push for specific changes that will make meaningful progress. For example, to spur affordable housing development, Habitat-NYC became a founding member of the Campaign for Inclusionary Zoning (please see related story, page 3).

By supporting specific policies and providing concrete action steps to help end New York's housing crisis, Habitat-NYC hopes the Covenant will be a useful resource to get involved in our new advocacy program. For more information on the Habitat-NYC Housing Covenant or to express your support, please contact Kevin Sullivan at 718-246-5656 x.312 or [ksullivan@habitatnyc.org](mailto:ksullivan@habitatnyc.org).

# Habitat- NYC Rallies for Housing

On May 13, Habitat-NYC partnered with the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing in a marathon day of advocacy at City Hall that attracted more than 60 faith institutions and 500 participants.

The 20 hours of events to call on New York to end homelessness, construct more affordable housing and “build the blessed city” included a day-time rally at City Hall, an evening program at St. Paul’s Chapel and an overnight vigil in City Hall Park.

Habitat-NYC contributed to the event in unique ways. The rally featured prominent political and religious leaders putting the “planks” of affordable housing policy into place on a model wood-frame house—built by Habitat-NYC staff and volunteers. And many of the faith institutions and religious leaders who participated in the event have signed onto Habitat-NYC’s ongoing Building on Faith Campaign.

“Ensuring that all New Yorkers have a decent, affordable home is a fundamental matter of conscience and morality,” said Habitat-NYC Advocacy Director Kevin Sullivan. “Habitat-NYC is proud to stand with our Faith Partners to call on New York to end homelessness and substandard housing in our city by building more affordable homes.”

City Council Members Gale Brewer, Letitia James and David Yassky spoke at the afternoon rally, emphasizing the importance of affordable housing for the economic and social well-being of the city. City Council Member Yassky called on the city to adopt mandatory inclusionary zoning—which would require affordable homes to be built alongside market-rate housing in neighborhoods undergoing rezoning—as a means of creating affordable housing that benefits the entire city.

Richard Wong, Habitat-NYC Director of Community Partnerships, served as the wor-



Habitat-NYC Director of Family Partners Lourdes Davila marches

ship leader for the evening program, welcoming hundreds of New Yorkers to St. Paul’s for an interfaith convocation for housing justice. “It is important for individuals and congregations from every religion to raise their voice for more affordable housing,” Mr. Wong said. “We urge all people of faith and good conscience to join with Habitat-NYC as we work to ensure that all New Yorkers have a roof over their head and

## New York Includes Us All!

### Habitat-NYC Speaks Out for Inclusionary Zoning

To fulfill our mission to ensure that all New Yorkers have a decent, affordable place to live, Habitat-NYC has joined with more than 50 other organizations to call on New York City to adopt mandatory inclusionary zoning.

The campaign held a rally at City Hall in mid-May to garner public and political support. Mayor Bloomberg has proposed an overhaul of the city’s zoning code to open vast areas of the city to residential development, including Manhattan’s West Side, the Brooklyn Waterfront, East Harlem, western Queens and Greenpoint-Williamsburg. These rezonings will transform what New York looks like forever.

Habitat-NYC helped found the Campaign for Inclusionary Zoning to urge the city to man-

date inclusionary zoning as part of the zoning changes. Inclusionary zoning requires that affordable homes be built alongside market-rate developments in rezoned areas of the city. A mixed-income approach—with luxury condos alongside homes affordable to police officers, firefighters and teachers—will maximize development opportunities, create new jobs and business and build neighborhoods that are attractive and inclusive.

“The city’s lack of affordable housing is the social, economic and moral crisis of our time. Right now, we have a unique opportunity to shape what our city will look like and who will live here in the 21st century through an inclusive approach to the zoning code,” said Roland Lewis, executive director

of Habitat-NYC. “Inclusionary zoning will improve and strengthen New York’s neighborhoods, making the city a better place to live and work for everyone.”

Hundreds of communities across the country have adopted inclusionary zoning, including Boston, Denver, Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco. The Campaign for Inclusionary Zoning has already attracted the support of 20 members of the City Council and dozens of faith institutions, community development corporations, neighborhoods groups and resident organizations city-wide.

To get involved in the campaign, please contact Kevin Sullivan at 718-246-5656 x.312 or [ksullivan@habitatnyc.org](mailto:ksullivan@habitatnyc.org).

# Corporate, Foundation, Government and Faith Gifts

Sponsorships during January 1, 2004 to June 30, 2004

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**Help us build more homes through  
a monthly giving program by joining  
our Foundation Builders Society!**

Become a monthly donor to Habitat for Humanity-NYC by setting up automatic deductions from your credit card for an amount that you choose: \$10, \$15 or \$25 per month. You can help us to cut costs by: creating a steady cash flow and eliminating multiple solicitation mailings.

By becoming a Foundation Builders Society member you will be invited to groundbreaking, home dedications and other special build events. Join now by calling Judith Werner at (718) 246-5656 X306 to give her your pledge information.

Individual donors of \$500 or more will be acknowledged in the fall issue of *Habitat Times*.

# The Allende Family: A Father's Gift to His Daughter



Photo: Carissa Templeton

## Bronx Family Partner Raymond Allende

Raymond Allende is very close to his daughter, Grace, age 7. They currently share a makeshift bedroom in a fifth-floor walk-up apartment in the Bronx, staying in the living room of his cousin's apartment. They also share the space with Raymond's brother Edwin, age 24, who is currently disabled and receives SSI.

Within the next couple of months, Raymond, Grace and Edwin will move into their own home, a three-bedroom, two-bath rowhouse in the Bronx built by Habitat-NYC. Raymond says he is happy because his daughter will finally have her own room. "It's for my

daughter, giving my daughter more privacy, her own space as she's getting older," he says. In anticipation of moving into a bigger space with a full backyard, Raymond bought his daughter a new dog, a Yorkshire terrier named Candy.

Raymond has held the same job for the past 11 years, working for a custodial maintenance company under contract to the federal government. With home prices rising across New York City, and with financial and legal difficulties over custody of his daughter, Raymond simply could not afford his own space. His biggest problem, he says, was putting together enough money for a down payment. Habitat-NYC, with its "sweat equity" requirement in lieu of a financial down payment and use of volunteer labor, was a perfect fit. "Knowing that my money is going somewhere, into my mortgage, into a home that's going to be mine, it makes me more motivated," Raymond says. "Going to work everyday, I feel like I'm working for

something."

Raymond first learned about Habitat-NYC as a volunteer. His good friend and work colleague Antonio Cruz became a Habitat-NYC homeowner in Harlem, and Raymond volunteered to help build Antonio's house. Antonio repaid the favor in kind: when Habitat-NYC announced a new project in the Bronx, Antonio encouraged Raymond to apply.

Raymond says that partnering with Habitat-NYC has been a "wonderful experience." "I love working there," he says. "When I was working on my house, it was a learning experience for me, to see it made out of scratch, it's amazing." He says he is particularly happy knowing that he is building a better future for his daughter. "To me, it's a big accomplishment, for me to give my daughter a new home."

## "Good Morning America" Comes to Harlem

### Diane Sawyer Volunteers To Build With Habitat-NYC

On May 12, millions of Americans nationwide shared in the Habitat-NYC experience. Diane Sawyer and Robin Roberts, co-hosts of ABC's "Good Morning America," volunteered with Habitat-NYC. The popular morning show featured their involvement in celebration of Mother's Day, along with Habitat-NYC families, volunteers and staff.

The two co-anchors volunteered to help build a home for Habitat-NYC Family Partner Brenda Smith-West. Ms. Smith-West is "truly amazing," Ms. Sawyer told the audience of more than 4 million viewers. "She's a single mother raising five children. She holds down and works a very hard job while she does it, plus she plays an active role in her church," Ms. Sawyer said. "And imagine doing all that

and contributing 300 sweat hours toward building a dream, trying to move her kids out of the tiny cramped space they have to live in because that's all they could afford."

Both Ms. Sawyer and Ms. Roberts spent a full day volunteering to help the Smith-West family, putting up insulation and drywall in their future kitchen and living room. Ms. Smith-West said that in the days after "Good Morning America" featured her family, she received phone calls from friends and relatives from across the country, congratulating her on her new home. "I feel so blessed," she said.

Ms. Sawyer and Ms. Roberts volunteered through the Women Build program, an initiative by Habitat for Humanity to celebrate

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Diane Sawyer joins Habitat-NYC Family Partner Brenda Smith-West to help build her future home in Harlem.

Photo: Elizabeth Powell

# Habitat for Humanity - New York City transforms lives and our city by uniting all New Yorkers around the cause of decent, affordable housing for everyone.

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## Become a Weekend Warrior!

Habitat-NYC needs your skills! Weekend Warriors are amateur enthusiasts or professionals who have construction skills and are willing to share them with others. We cannot build without them, and we are always looking for more!

Please contact Deborah Nocella at 718.246.5656 x.310 or [dnocella@habitatnyc.org](mailto:dnocella@habitatnyc.org) to become a Weekend Warrior, build homes and transform lives.

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## September 14, 2004 Whole Foods 5% Day

On September 14, 2004 shop at any Whole Foods store and support Habitat-NYC! Whole Foods is donating 5 percent of the day's profits to Habitat for Humanity.

## GMA continued from page 5

female empowerment and highlight the contributions that women make to end the housing crisis and help other women.

"By uniting women across racial, ethnic and social boundaries, Women Build empowers women to take action to solve the housing crisis," said Maureen McPhilly O'Reilly, Habitat-NYC's board chair. "Women have the power and determination to tackle this problem on their own—one home, one family at a time."

The Women Build program will continue in Harlem throughout the year, and Ms. Smith-West has already invited Ms. Sawyer and Ms. Roberts to return to see her completed home.