

## Habitat-NYC's Single Moms Are Super Heroes

**T**his Mother's Day, Habitat-NYC is celebrating a special kind of Mom—one who labors with work and family, single-handedly balancing the two with little assistance or a safety net. These hard-working single mothers experience hardship and heartbreak, but they are big dreamers and fierce fighters, working against adversity to build better lives for their children and themselves.

Roughly two-thirds of New York City's families living in poverty are headed by single women. These Wonder Women struggle to make ends meet, but statistics show the steep toll that privation takes on their children, who are more likely to drop out of school, be exposed to crime and lack adequate health care. A safe, affordable home makes an immeasurable difference in their lives.

SuperMoms are the majority of our Habitat-NYC family partners, and we'll be saluting them during our annual Women Build on Mother's Day weekend

**Maria Pomales** is a typical Habitat-NYC homeowner. Back in 2002, she worked full time as a hospital administrator, raising two teenagers in a cramped apartment shared with her sister's family.

Maria worried about her children's future. "As a single mother,

you're always thinking: 'What if something happens to me? What will happen to them?'"

That's when she learned about a co-worker who was moving into a Habitat-NYC home.

Maria moved fast: by December 2004, her family was celebrating the holidays in their new Habitat-NYC home in the Bronx. "It was like our Christmas present," she says.

Today, Maria has an affordable home with enough space and quiet for her

children to study. "One of my biggest challenges as a single parent was making sure the kids finished school," says Maria. "My daughter Sadie graduated and now she works with me at the hospital and will be going back to college soon."

Her son Deivy recently graduated high school. "Thank the lord!" she says, "When they called his name to give him his diploma – I think I was the one that screamed the loudest. You would've thought it was me who was graduating."

*Continued on page 6*



*Habitat-NYC homeowner Maria Pomales, center, with her daughter, Sadie, and son, Deivy.*

## Single Moms in NYC

### According to a Community Service Society study of single, low-income working moms in New York City:

- 80 percent did not receive employee-paid health benefits for themselves or their children;
- More than a third reported they were unable to obtain needed medical care because they could not afford it;
- 53 percent did not have a single day of paid sick leave, and 61 percent had no paid vacation.

### Habitat-NYC helps families and children:

- 45% of Family Partner children's grades have improved since moving into their new home;
- 25% of students where Habitat-NYC builds performed at or above grade-level in math and English;
- 98% of Family Partner children in high school have graduated (72% NYC-wide);
- 69% of Family Partner children who are graduates of high school are enrolled in college (27% NYC-wide).

*Habitat for Humanity - New York City transforms lives and our city by building quality homes for families in need and by uniting all New Yorkers around the cause of affordable housing.*

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## From the Executive Director

Today, many people are nervous and scared as we read daily stories about layoffs, foreclosures, financial crises and scandals—or are touched directly by these tragedies. But amid the gloomy headlines, we at Habitat-NYC have some good news to share.

I'm proud to tell you that, despite today's anxieties, we see a renewed commitment to our mission. Our friends and neighbors from all walks of life are stepping forward to build homes and community in partnership with Habitat-NYC.

We are working hard—together—to help the New York City families who need it most.

Here are some of our "good news" highlights:

- We're building more homes, with more volunteers, for more low-income families than ever before;
- We're finishing up the largest, greenest multifamily project in Habitat for Humanity's history worldwide in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn. By the fall, families will be moving into these safe and healthy homes;
- We're seeing a spike in generous New Yorkers who are volunteering on our worksite and in our office;
- We're disseminating important financial literacy information to low-income families and neighborhoods through our "Loan Rangers" campaign—information that will help them make wise financial decisions at a time when every penny counts;
- We're embarking on an innovative, first-of-its-kind development partnership in the South Bronx, which will provide a dozen new homeownership opportunities for low-income homebuyers this year;
- Day in and day out, we are working with energetic students, faith groups and individuals who are lending their voices to call for more support to build and preserve more affordable housing in New York City and New York State.

Certainly, New York City is facing unprecedented challenges. But at Habitat-NYC, we are continually amazed by the perseverance and generosity of our supporters, who, like us, want to transform forever the lives of hardworking, low-income New York City families.

We want to let you know how much we appreciate your support as volunteers, advisors and donors. We are proud and excited to work with you to strengthen our wonderful city.

## Join Us on Facebook & Twitter

**D**o you Facebook? Twittering at all? If so, join us now and be our friends and followers!

Habitat-NYC is on top of the fast changing technologies of modern telecommunication. We are excited about these new opportunities to stay connected with fellow advocates around us, and we encourage all of our friends to stay engaged with Habitat-NYC and our mission.

Our Facebook page features regular uploads of pictures and links to show our friends more of what Habitat-NYC is about and what we can offer for those looking for

ways to get involved. Friends are also encouraged to post on our Facebook wall and comment on our progress and events.

Twitter is another new social network we've joined to inform followers of the moment-to-moment happenings within our world.

Friend us and follow us as we continue to build our network of fellow believers in social justice and pool our energies together to make a lasting impact on our community.

Look for us on Facebook at **Habitat NYC** and on Twitter at **Habitatnyc**.

# Volunteers Build in Tribute to Dr. King's Dream

On the frigid weekend before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, more than 100 volunteers bundled up and took part in Habitat-NYC's annual build.

Wrapped in scarves, hats and layers, these selfless volunteers displayed wonderful virtues of humility and self-sacrifice by getting down on their knees to lay flooring in our Atlantic Avenue complex in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn. It was an uplifting sight as people from diverse congregations, religions and organizations combined their efforts to support Dr. King's lasting dream of social justice.

This annual "Building on the Dream" event was founded on Dr. King's vision of social justice by putting faith into action. It provided volunteers and future homeowners, working alongside one another, a chance to do exactly that—to put their beliefs into tangible accomplishments.

"Dr. King based his life on the belief that 'hate tears down and destroys. Love builds up and unites.' So it is fitting that we come together—people of all races, faiths and cultural backgrounds—to build homes in his honor," said **Josh Lockwood**, Executive Director of Habitat-NYC.

On Sunday, volunteers and family partners gathered into True Holy Church to illustrate their own dreams for New York City and to listen to local faith leaders share their insights on Dr. King. Habitat-NYC also launched its Housing Covenant 2009, which targets policies at the city, state and federal levels to help increase low-income housing, and prevent predatory lending aimed at low-income New Yorkers.

With these activities and more, Habitat employees, volunteers, and future homeowners spent the weekend celebrating the gift of opportunities, the historic election of the nation's first African-American president, as well as the good company of fellow advocates for affordable housing.

*Below are a few of the more than 100 volunteers who honored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. over the King Day weekend by building Habitat-NYC homes.*

*At a Sunday celebration, volunteers illustrated their dreams for New York City's future, sang and listened to faith leaders talking about King's legacy.*



## Polo Sales Benefit Habitat-NYC

Now you can look good and do good at the same time!

In celebration of National Volunteer Week, **Polo Ralph Lauren** and Habitat for Humanity invite you to **Shop For A Cause**.

From April 17 through April 25, you can shop online at [RalphLauren.com](http://RalphLauren.com), save 15 percent on all purchases and designate Habitat-NYC to receive an extra 15 percent of your purchase price.

To participate, go to [RalphLauren.com](http://RalphLauren.com). At checkout, enter **HHNVW**. You'll receive your discount and Habitat-NYC will receive a donation to help build homes for New York City families.

## We're Looking for a Few Good Families

Habitat-NYC is seeking future homeowners for a new project in the South Bronx and for two-bedroom affordable condos in our Atlantic Avenue complex in Brooklyn.

These once-in-a-lifetime opportunities are open to qualified low-income working families.

Those who make the November 2009 cutoff for purchasing their Habitat-NYC homes may also be eligible for the one-time \$8,000 federal tax credit, which is part of the current federal economic stimulus package.

Our criteria and information on the application process, along with downloadable forms, are available on our website: [www.habitatnyc.org](http://www.habitatnyc.org). Click on **Own a Habitat Home**.

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# Habitat-NYC Attracts Special Families . . . And Special Leaders

On January 28, 2009 the Rev. **Mark Hallinan** was appointed as Chair of Habitat-NYC's Board of Directors. Father Mark is the Assistant for Social Ministries to the Provincial of the New York Province of the Society of Jesus, where he leads the ministry in social justice issues and is active in many progressive community organizations. Father Mark, who holds a bachelor's degree from Kenyon College in Ohio, a Master of Divinity from the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, CA, and a Master of Arts in Medieval History from Fordham University, joined Habitat-NYC's Board in 2004.

He recently shared in a lively roundtable discussion with two previous Board Chairs of Habitat-NYC, **Les Bluestone** and **Maureen O'Reilly**. A transcript of the roundtable is online at [www.habitatnyc.org](http://www.habitatnyc.org) under **Publications**.

**H**abitat-NYC: *Are there memorable moments you've had with Habitat-NYC that stand out for you?*

**Maureen:** I can't say that there's one that stands out. I just find that Habitat attracts a very special kind of homeowner . . . they all really want to help themselves and they don't want to be given anything. . . they really want to be involved on a greater level than just getting their homes.

**Les:** I think the family stories are the best parts for me. I remember the dedication at one house we did. The family was there—a reverend and his wife and his two grown kids. He started to tell his story and it was like *Queen for a Day*, if you remember that old TV show. He had a job, then he was unemployed, and then they lost their home . . . but with help from Habitat-NYC he turned it all around, he found religion, and here he is in his new home. The crowd was in tears.

**Father Mark:** I always like the testimonials that the family partners

give at the annual Habitat for Humanity Gala. I think it is such an important part of the event because they are in a situation that they never could have imagined themselves in, and they speak with such passion and such eloquence about what this means to them as a family. It is such a beautiful moment.

**Habitat-NYC:** *When you look back on your tenure, is there an accomplishment you're particularly proud of?*

**Maureen:** It was a transitional time for us. We were trying to figure out our identity as a Habitat affiliate because New York City is such a different environment from where Habitat for Humanity typically builds. . . we were growing and becoming more and more inclusive and reaching out to all different religions and different groups. It was a growth period, and we went from a modest, small organization into a much more robust, dynamic one.

**Les:** My brain doesn't think in terms of accomplishments—I think of all the things I wanted to get done, but didn't! There are certainly things that happened during my term that I'm thrilled about . . . the fact that we are in the biggest, greenest Habitat building ever in Brooklyn (Atlantic Avenue) is miraculous, and the staff we have is the best it's ever been. I think we have established an identity as a leader and an innovator among the hundreds of Habitat affiliates across the country—I certainly experience it everywhere I go . . . people want to know what Habitat-NYC is doing, and how we pull off our big, exciting projects.

**Father Mark:** I hope to sustain the ability to serve more families than we ever have before . . . to be open to new ways of doing what we do here . . . as the challenges we face become more significant going forward. As we have grown bigger . . . we have to be attentive to the common ownership we've been able to effect. I think that's really the strength of who we are . . . that common bond shared by folks across New York City . . . that bond is very important for us to sustain.

**Habitat-NYC:** *Several years ago, in addition to building affordable homes, Habitat-NYC sought to effect change through advocacy. How do you see this role in advocacy?*

**Les:** Our advocacy work has put us at the top of the news radar, and it's been successful because we have such strong knowledge of low-income families and their housing challenges. Words are nice and our advocacy is an important part of it . . . but our strength is that our advocacy is rooted in real-world affordable housing experience.

**Maureen:** And we aren't advocating for just us . . . we aren't pushing our own agenda . . . it's for people everywhere.

**Father Mark:** We do advocacy that is educational. We are educating the public and elected officials about the needs of low-income families, the families we work with everyday . . . I think they respect that.





# How Sweet It Is

## Valentine's Day Volunteers Swap Chocolates for Hammers

Most New York couples spent Valentine's Day celebrating their affection over intimate dinners in restaurants or in candlelit homes.

But 40 couples poured their hearts into homebuilding for Habitat for Humanity - New York City. Through their efforts, these generous couples also raised more than \$10,000 to help cover the costs of our 41 affordable new homes at our Atlantic Avenue complex in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn.

Despite the dusty construction site and aching bodies, the group was all smiles throughout the day, knowing that they were helping out fellow New York families in need.

Among them were **Jim and Alice McQuade** ("the love of my life," he says), who have been happily married for 20 years. "We are enjoying spending time with each other and

the chance to perhaps 'pay it forward' so the good deeds we are performing continue to be repeated over and over again," says Jim.

**Gayle and Larry Amato** added, "We felt this was a good way to give back to others. We hope to help families and build relationships with other volunteers. We are thrilled to be in Brooklyn and helping such a good cause."

**Emily Shaw and Simon Workman** said, "For us, the idea of volunteering on this romantic day is well worth the aches and pains we may feel after."

Valentine's Day volunteers shared their love with Habitat-NYC family partners on this special day. Photos: Anthony Collins



*Continued from page 1*

Her children understand how hard it is to be a SuperMom. "For Father's Day, my daughter gives me a card because she says I've been both mother and father to her."

And her hard work has paid off. "This home - this is mine," says Maria. "But this is theirs, too. My children are always going to have someplace to live . . . it will always be there for them. Thanks to Habitat, my dream became a reality."

\* \* \*

Nine years ago, **Brenda Ferebee** was a physically disabled single mom living with her son, 10, and daughter, 11, in a tiny apartment with two postage-stamp-sized bedrooms shared with roaches and mice.

"We were on top of each other," she says. The kids were almost teenagers and still sharing a room. The apartment was not handicap-accessible, and the rent kept escalating.

But Brenda's SuperMom drive for a better life was stronger than a locomotive: balancing work, parenting and college, she still had energy to help build her Habitat-NYC home. Did her many responsibilities and her physical

disability keep Brenda from performing her sweat equity?

"Are you kidding?" says Brenda, whose home on Hart Street was part of the 2000 Jimmy Carter Work Project. "Whatever I could do I did. I was always mixing something, working on something."

Now an artist, Brenda has continued to use the lessons she learned by building her own home. "I love the fact that I don't have to call on professionals to do my own repairs. I now have the skills to do it myself," she says. "Every opportunity I get I'm fixing up my home, helping friends to fix up theirs."

Brenda adds, "I love working with my hands." This spring she will graduate with a bachelor of fine arts from Long Island University.

Her latest art piece has been informed by her experiences building her own home—it is a collection of life-sized, hand-painted cut-outs of people collaboratively renovating a room. "Spackling, drilling, painting . . ." she says, "These individuals are all doing something different and they have some physical or mental limitation."

With this exhibition Brenda hopes to encourage the public to look beyond adversities to

see people for who they are and what they are capable of doing. Because of her extraordinary accomplishments, Brenda doesn't think of herself as disabled.

Brenda's children are now in college; her daughter studies early childhood education and her son is in performing arts.

She emphasizes self-sufficiency. "I tell them: 'You have to learn to do these things on your own,'" says this Habitat-NYC Wonder Woman. "They definitely appreciate everything I've done. They see how much I've endured, how hard I've worked for everything, how much I've accomplished. They see I'm finishing college now, so they know they'd better, too!"

### Art Show Looks Beyond Adversities

Habitat-NYC homeowner Brenda Ferebee will exhibit her artwork at a show on **Mon., May 4, 5-7 pm** at the **Selena Gallery**, Long Island University-Brooklyn Campus, 1 University Plaza in downtown Brooklyn.

Her work features life-size figures renovating a three-dimensional room.