



# Habitat-NYC TIMES



General Colin L. Powell cuts the ribbon on his namesake affordable homes.

Photo by Anthony Collins

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## Gen. Colin Powell Welcomes Habitat-NYC Families Home to the South Bronx

In a double homecoming, General Colin L. Powell returned to his boyhood neighborhood in the South Bronx in September to welcome families to their new, affordable homes named in his honor.

"It's great to be back in the Bronx," Powell told a cheering crowd of future homeowners, elected officials, government leaders, Habitat-NYC volunteers and Bronx residents, who gathered to watch him cut the ribbon on his namesake building.

The General Colin L. Powell Apartments were developed in a unique partnership between Blue Sea Development Co., Habitat-NYC and New York City and State agencies. Located at 715 Fox St. in the Longwood section of the South Bronx, this 50-unit co-op building is only a few blocks from the third-floor walk-up at 952 Kelly Street, where General Powell grew up.

This building is a truly cooperative venture: Many of the government leaders who supported the project joined Powell at the ribbon-cutting. Among them were:



Family Partners with General Colin L. Powell

Photo by Anthony Collins

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New York City  
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# From the Executive Director

**H**abitat-NYC recently enjoyed an amazing week that began with welcoming General Colin Powell back to his hometown neighborhood, the Longwood section of the Bronx. Hearing the General speak from the heart about growing up in the South Bronx was an inspiration to all who attended the ribbon-cutting at the General Colin L. Powell Apartments.

But an equally big thrill was a barbecue organized by the 41 families at our Atlantic Avenue complex in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in a beautiful courtyard blooming with flowers and trees, our family partner/homebuyers treated us to chicken, ribs and chocolate cake — a “thank you” to the staff of Habitat-NYC. As the barbecue concluded, family partners like Esther Huambo, Beatrice Logan, Custodio Castillo Jr, Jessica Castillo and Marilyn Vasquez reflected on their respective journeys as family partners.

Beatrice shared her joy at no longer having to ask her son to sleep in a living room each night. Esther expressed gratitude at no longer sharing a bedroom with her two children. The Castillo family praised God for helping them find a path from a cramped, damaged apartment, to a temporary shelter, and finally to their three-bedroom Habitat-NYC home.

And all the family partners reveled in the fact that at Atlantic Avenue, they had created a true community of like-minded neighbors. Jessica Castillo concluded the day with a prayer, noting that many of the family partners had worked side-by-side during the sweat equity process, forging bonds that will last a lifetime.

Marilyn Vasquez excitedly announced that she and her husband Miguel were expecting a second child, who will be raised at Atlantic Avenue. Putting her arm around her neighbor, Esther Huambo — they had met while building their homes together — Marilyn told us, “Esther will be this baby’s godmother!”

Building homes, building families, building community. This is the heart of Habitat-NYC’s mission.



## Support Our Habitat Builder Awards Dinner!

On Nov. 16, about 500 Habitat-NYC volunteers, donors and family partners will come together to celebrate our investments in hardworking low-income New York City families.

Many of Habitat-NYC’s most prominent supporters mark the date on their calendars, from CEOs of leading companies to speakers and presenters like Susan Sarandon, Tom Brokaw, Al Roker, and Bob Vila, among others.

“At the Builder Awards dinner, when the family partner of the year

is honored, it’s so emotional. There’s no other moment quite like it,” notes Father Mark Hallinan.

Join New Yorkers passionate about Habitat-NYC’s work and support the Builder Awards by sponsoring tables with friends and colleagues or buying tickets.

For more information, click on [www.habitatnyc.org](http://www.habitatnyc.org) or contact James Andrews at Habitat-NYC at 212-991-4000 ext. 330 or [jandrews@habitatnyc.org](mailto:jandrews@habitatnyc.org)

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.

# Players, Citi Volunteers Inducted into ‘Drywall’ of Fame

**M**ets greats Daryl Strawberry and Mookie Wilson did more than just hammer one home this summer. They hammered eight homes. And hung drywall, too.

Strawberry and Wilson worked with more than 20 Citi volunteers to help build affordable Habitat-NYC homes at our Hart-Lafayette site in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. The event kicked off a Mets Hall of Fame Weekend.

A few days later, members of the Mets Alumni Association presented Habitat-NYC volunteer Alex Liberatore with the “Teammates in the Community” award during a pre-game ceremony at Citi Field. Alex, a long-time Habitat-NYC cornerstone volunteer and lifelong Mets fan, was honored for his dedication and commitment to transforming lives by helping to build quality homes for families in need.

“As part of our continued commitment to New York City and Habitat for Humanity, we are excited to team-up with this all-star lineup and take part in this meaningful and impactful opportunity to provide affordable housing to families in need,” said Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Chief Diversity Officer, at Citigroup.



Mets greats Mookie Wilson and Darryl Strawberry secure a wall in Bed-Stuy

Dave Howard, Executive Vice President, of Business Operations for New York Mets, said, “We’re grateful to our partners at Citi and Habitat-NYC for the opportunity to lend a hand on this important project that will have a lasting impact on so many lives.”

Strawberry, along with teammate Dwight Gooden, Manager Davey Johnson and General Manager Frank Cashen, were inducted into the Mets Hall of Fame on August 1.

## I Got My Habitat-NYC Home Thanks to Spike Lee!

**W**hen it rains, it pours . . . inside Alfred Almadovar’s apartment.

Alfred, 33, works as a personal assistant for five doctors at a Manhattan cancer facility, supplementing his income with a part-time job at a popular sporting goods store. He was at the store one afternoon, bemoaning to a colleague the conditions in his rundown apartment — windows that leak, freezing temperatures in the winter, repairs that just never get done.

“I told my friend how I’d been searching for a better place to live, but couldn’t find anything decent I could afford,” Alfred relates.

That’s when a customer looked up from the cleats he was helping his son try on and urged Alfred to look into Habitat-NYC. The customer was filmmaker Spike Lee, who had recently visited Habitat-NYC’s new homes on Lafayette Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

Thanks to Spike Lee’s suggestion the match was made. Alfred searched our website, found the last available one-bedroom condo at the Atlantic Avenue complex, applied and became a Habitat family partner. As soon as Alfred completes his sweat equity requirement, he will become a homeowner.

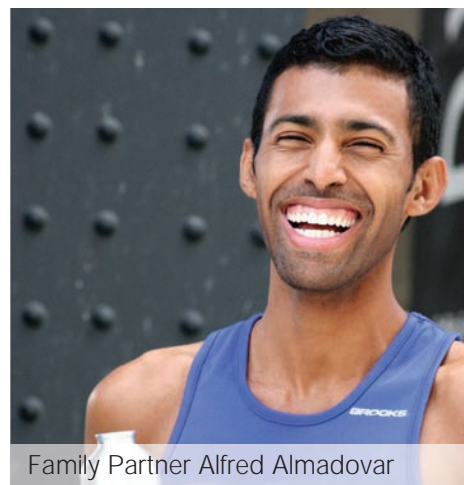
“This will be a place I can actually call home, where I can grow with the community” says Alfred, who was born in Puerto Rico and lived most of his life in Bed-Stuy.

“Community” is important to Alfred. In addition to his work with cancer patients, he is a marathon runner who runs to raise money for various causes, often in memory of his patients who have died.

Although Alfred has asthma and a heart condition, he gains strength from adversity. “I’ve only been running for six years — ever since my doctors told me I

couldn’t,” he says.

Alfred’s Habitat-NYC home will be a fourth-floor walkup. No problem. He just ran up the 1,576 stairs to the top of the Empire State Building!



Family Partner Alfred Almadovar

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# Transforming a Corner of the South Bronx

Only a few years ago, a barren contaminated lot festered at the corner of Fox Street and Leggett Avenue in an area of the South Bronx once known as the infamous “Fort Apache.”

Today, the site is home to the General Colin L. Powell Apartments, an imposing, 50-unit cooperative structure, winner of a LEED platinum designation and heralded as the greenest affordable multifamily building in the State of New York.

The transformation at 517 Fox Streets demonstrates the power of people from all walks of life uniting to build quality affordable housing.

It marks a “first” for Habitat affiliates in the United States, developed in a unique partnership between Blue Sea Development

Company, a for-profit affordable housing developer, and Habitat-NYC.

Habitat-NYC families will occupy eight of the homes. These future owners, working with Habitat volunteers, constructed the interiors of their units. The remainder of the units will be purchased by families selected by the city’s Housing Preservation and Development Department’s lottery system.

Some of building’s state-of-the art “green” elements include:

- Green roof
- Co-generation system that produces electricity and hot water
- Non-toxic materials and controlled filtered ventilation systems
- Energy-saving appliances and lights
- Sustainable wood flooring.

## Barbara Vargas’ Step Forward

**G**reen. It’s what Barbara Vargas never seemed to have enough of to give her kids the life she felt they deserved.

As a single mother of two, she worked hard, with a steady job as a secretary with the United Federation of Teachers, to provide the basics for Christine and Daniel.

“You do what you have to do as a parent,” Barbara says. “I worked very hard. I don’t know how I did it.”

While Barbara earned enough to provide the essentials for her family, she wanted to give her children more. Their apartment was too small and crowded. They were plagued by leaks that “just wouldn’t stay repaired.”

What’s more, they were forced to share their already-tight quarters with unwanted guests — a constant infestation of water bugs.

Both Christina and Daniel are in college now . . . and still sharing the same bedroom. One day, Barbara complained about her situation to her friend, Habitat homeowner Maria Pomaes, who suggested Habitat-NYC.

Barbara logged onto Habitat-NYC’s website and downloaded an application for apartments under construction near her current neighborhood. Before she knew it, bonding time with her children consisted of donning hard hats and installing drywall and wood flooring.

Her new home, now known as the General Colin L. Powell Apartments, sports a community room, Energy Star appliances, and a green roof.

“I didn’t even know that green roofs existed,” says Barbara. “I read up on how they work.



Fox Street & Leggett Ave., circa 1940



Fox Street & Leggett Avenue, for years remained an empty lot.



Today: General Colin L. Powell Apts.

Bottom two photos by Larry Racioppo

Photo by Deborah Schwartz



Barbara Vargas (right) and son, Daniel, working on the green roof

# Cruzmaria Renvill: 'The Bronx Is Booming'

“The Bronx isn’t burning anymore — it’s booming!” said Habitat-NYC family partner Cruzmaria Renvill, as she presented Gen. Colin Powell with a plaque on behalf of all of the families who will be living at the General Colin L. Powell Apartments

“I’m grateful for the American Dream, going from renting to owning my own home,” she said during ribbon-cutting festivities.

Her new co-op will be life-changing for Cruzmaria and her 10-year-old daughter, Gabriella, who currently share a one-bedroom apartment in a building plagued

with robberies.

A physical therapist assistant and single mom, Cruzmaria happily juggled the tasks of breadwinning, parenting and sweat-equity homebuilding.

“Helping to build my own home was great. You get to see what it’s going to look like. It makes you really want it because you work so hard for it,” she says.

“This home will be here for me when I get old,” this proud new homeowner says. “My



Cruzmaria Renvill presents plaque to General Powell

Photo by Anthony Collins

daughter will love it. She will have a place, something for safe-keeping, something for us. Our long-term investment.”

## Powell Apts. Ribbon Cutting

*Continued from page 1*

NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner Rafael E. Cestero, NYC Housing Development Corporation President Marc Jahr, NYS Housing Commissioner Brian E. Lawlor, Congressman Jose E. Serrano, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., State Senator Ruben Diaz Sr., State Assembly Member Marcos Crespo and City Councilmember Maria del Carmen Arroyo.

Delta Air Lines and Credit Suisse representatives were among the Habitat-NYC corporate supporters who attended.

Powell also was welcomed by a number of his boyhood friends from the Bronx and his daughter Linda. After the celebration, he joined longtime friends Rev. Louis Gigante and Rev. Theodora Brooks for an impromptu visit to St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church, which his family attended.

Powell’s parents, Luther and Maud Powell, immigrated to the United States from Jamaica. He was born in Harlem and moved to the South Bronx in 1940 at the age of three. The Powell family shared a four-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a walkup at 952 Kelly Street, near the new homes that bear his name.

As a youngster, Powell attended P.S. 39, now a community center, and I.S. 52. He is a graduate of Morris High School and the City College of New York (CCNY), where

he earned a bachelor’s degree in geology. He also participated in ROTC at CCNY and received a commission as an Army second lieutenant upon graduation in June 1958.

“I am so very pleased and humbled to be here today for the ribbon cutting of this wonderful building named in my honor,” Powell said. “I know this section of the Bronx very well, having lived on both Fox and Kelly Streets.”

“I have watched with pleasure and admiration as the neighborhood has seen a renaissance, and I hope future generations of youngsters will enjoy growing up here as much as I did.”



Construction on Powell Apts., May, 2009

Photo by Anthony Collins



952 Kelly Street, General Powell's childhood home.