

JMG Speech: 4/3/04, accepting Twin Cities Habitat For Humanity's "Community Builder" Award.

Thank-you Jevetta Steele, Tom Plum, Terry Griffith (Habitat Homebuyer also honored at this event), Habitat Board and staff, and my friend and colleague, Stephen Seidel (Habitat Executive Director).

I am honored and humbled to be acknowledged with this award and accept it on behalf of all the dedicated and hardworking staff at the PHA and our Board of Commissioners. Let me recognize the PHA table (PHA Board Chair, Andy Boss, resident and Board member, Shirley Kane, resident Dennis Shulstrom, and the wonderful staff here tonight, Marilyn Porter, Rita Ander, Irene Mbiti, and Steve Johnson).

Habitat and the St. Paul PHA share a common vision of tackling the affordable housing crisis this nation faces. I am proud to be a part of this community and play a small role in our community building work.

I'll put my brief remarks into the context of a story I love:

A man walked along the seashore and was greeted by a young boy.
The boy was tossing stranded starfish back into the ocean.

The man said, "Why do you bother,
There must be a million stranded starfish,
How can what you do possibly matter?"

The little boy looked back, picked up another starfish and said, "It matters to this one" (and threw it back into the sea).

The work of Habitat obviously matters to Terry Griffith and her family. And last year, Habitat dedicated the 150,000th house it has built worldwide! What an accomplishment.

As Habitat's Founder Millard Fuller said, "The effects of a simple, decent place to live radiate out to every member of the family, and the positive benefits go even beyond the family, creating a ripple effect of growth, change, and development throughout the neighborhood, city, state, country, and ultimately the world."

Through the partnership between Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, Anderson Windows, and the St. Paul Public Housing Agency, another 30 Habitat homes are under construction in St. Paul today:

- 30 more households will see the benefits of a simple, yet decent place to call home.
- 30 households, perhaps stranded on their own beach of despair, will find renewed hope.

As most of you know, the core work of the St. Paul Public Housing Agency is providing safe, quality, affordable rental housing to 8000 households in St. Paul, work this Agency has carried out for the past 52 years beginning with the opening of McDonough Homes and Roosevelt Homes in 1952, and the first senior hi-rise in 1959.

We know how much this housing has mattered over such a long period of time. Literally thousands of families and individuals found a home to:

- Stabilize their life while they perhaps emigrated to this country,
- Or connected with needed support services,
- Or obtained an education or a job,
- Or regained their health,
- Or dealt with a disability,
- Or perhaps lost their health and passed on with dignity.

This work certainly matters.

I also know everyone in this room understands there is much more we can do as a community, region, and a nation:

- Over 34 million Americans live in poverty, more than the entire population of Canada!
- That figure grew by 1.7 million people last year alone.
- There are approximately 116 million housing units of all types in America.
 - Public housing is 1% of that supply.
 - No new public housing units have been added since the mid-1980's.
 - The President's budget proposal for 2005 will take away affordable housing assistance from an estimated 250,000 households.
- And even working full time does not always mean a family can afford housing.
 - Industry standards say a home is affordable if a family pays no more than 30% of their income for housing costs.
 - In 2004, a typical 2 BR apartment in the Twin Cities rents for \$922/mo.
 - By the 30% measure, a family would have to earn \$17.73 per hour or \$36,880 per year to afford to rent this apartment.
 - Or earn over \$55,000/year to purchase a modest home.

Fortunately, as individuals and as a community, we know what needs to be done, (ensure that we are at least keeping pace with modest increases in affordable rental and homeownership production each year).

We know how to do it (bring to scale all that our two organizations and other non-profits developers of affordable housing do).

And as former President Jimmy Carter said at the Campus Compact event a few weeks ago, we have the outlet in Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to tap into an individual's desire to help.

And, I contend, a nation so richly blessed as ours has the resources.

We just need a little more awareness and will.

That's where you come in. That is where your neighbors come in:

- Help today by giving generously to continue the wonderful work of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity.
- Help tomorrow when groups like Habitat for Humanity, or your local PHA or affordable housing group propose to build something in your community.
 - For instance, Governor Pawlenty has an ambitious plan to end chronic homelessness in our state by 2010. It involves the building of some 4000 units of supportive housing throughout the state. Go to that City Council meeting where you live when they consider these projects.
- Be heard. Say, "Yes, in my backyard!"

I assure you in accepting this award, the PHA Board and staff will continue to value and nurture our wonderful partnership with Twin Cities Habitat For Humanity. We know how much it matters.

Thank you. And may God's grace shine upon all of you.