

ST. THOMAS SOURCE

Hundreds Turn Out for Habitat-VI Fund-Raiser

by Beth Lawton

May 7, 2006 -- Habitat for Humanity's dream of building its first house on St. Thomas took a giant leap forward Sunday when Habitat's V.I. chapter kicked off its fund-raising campaign with a brunch at Coral World.



Habitat for Humanity of the U.S. Virgin Islands is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International. While its ultimate goal is to eliminate poverty housing in the territory, Habitat-VI's immediate goal is more modest: raise \$85,000 to start construction on its first house.

Habitat-VI President Tom Bolt said he expects construction to start in June.

The home will be at 4 Adele Gade on St. Thomas. Cecile Galiber deJongh and her family donated the property, which belonged to her grandmother long ago. The property will eventually be a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house for a low-income St. Thomas family. Several Galiber family members attended Sunday's fund-raiser.

The local Habitat chapter sold 300 tickets to the event, which included brunch, entertainment by the Louis Taylor Quartet, guest speakers and general admission to Coral World.

The event also featured a live house-building auction, during which bidders could make donations toward purchasing specific items for the construction, which included the foundation, interior and exterior doors, windows, a shower, toilets, sinks, and paint.

Keynote speaker Clive Rainey, the first ever Habitat International volunteer, is now the director of community relations for Habitat International.

"Clive is an inspiration to us all," Bolt said, introducing Rainey.

Rainey told numerous success stories about families who have purchased Habitat houses, noting that many children who grew up in them are volunteers today.

Rainey will be in the territory this week and again in early June to help promote Habitat-VI with a number of TV and radio appearances and speeches to area Rotary Clubs, religious congregations and more.

"I look forward to hearing great news about Habitat," Rainey said.

Also in attendance was Matt Allen, who had the original idea to start a Habitat affiliate in the territory.

"Listening to everybody speak is inspiring," Allen said. He encouraged the audience not to be afraid to contribute, no matter how long or short they will remain island residents.

Michelle Smitherman, a longtime Habitat International volunteer and board member of the V.I. affiliate, spoke of having a disease called "Habitatitus," which first struck her in Africa, where she has helped build houses in several countries. She said the fictitious disease, whose symptoms include a desire to mix cement, build scaffolding and eliminate poverty housing, eventually effects all Habitat volunteers.

"My need to be involved in construction is overwhelming," Smitherman said, before announcing she will be leaving soon for a three-week mission trip to build housing in Tanzania.

Bolt said he was quite pleased with the event but noted Sunday morning's brunch was not just a fund-raiser but also a way to thank those who have already donated time and money.

More fund-raising events for Habitat-VI are in the planning stages. For more on donating time or money, go to Habitat VI's [Web site](#) or call 714-5678.