

# HFH-VI's Newsletter

## From the President

As America is poised to celebrate the holiday season Habitat for Humanity of the U.S. Virgin Islands gives thanks for yet another milestone in providing safe and affordable housing to those in need in the Territory. Later this year, I will have the honor of signing the first Habitat deed and welcoming Celecia Hernandez and her family to their new home on Adele Gade on St. Thomas.

In discussing Habitat VI's progress, other Habitat affiliates have marveled at the amount of progress our organization has made in such a short period of time. Our success has been due in

large part to a wonderful and committed Board of Directors and to supporters such as you. Within the next year, Habitat will advance the dream of home ownership as we increase the number of homes we build and enhance our mission by providing renovations to qualified homeowners.

I invite you to join us in the New Year, become a part of an exciting and dynamic group that is making a difference within the Territory up the phone, contact our Habitat office or me, volunteer for one of our committees or come

pick up a hammer at one of our new project sites. Thank you for your generous support of Habitat for Humanity. May God bless you this holiday season and throughout the New Year.

Sincerely yours,  
Tom Bolt, Board President



Tom Bolt with various Summer 2007 Volunteers

**HFH-VI's mission** is to inspire hope by providing access to safe, decent and affordable housing in the USVI in partnership with God and the community.

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## Poverty Housing and Our Children

The US Virgin Islands 2006 Kids Counts report reveals that the median income for families living in the Virgin Islands fell by \$1,800 to \$32,613, while the median family income in the states increased by \$3,000 to \$55,327. In 2004, the VI child poverty rate reached 35.1 percent meaning that more than one in three VI children live below the poverty threshold.

The 2006 Kids Count report paints a bleak future for Virgin Island families and their children.

There is not enough data collected in the territory to draw an exact correlation between home ownership and poverty. However, there is enough empirical data and of course national studies to make the case that our failing public school system maybe directly related to inadequate or indecent housing?

According to an Ohio State University's report on the "The Impact of Homeownership on Child Outcomes," it may very well be possible. The 44-page report con-

cludes that children living in **standard** homes perform better in math, are more likely to go to college, are healthier, and less likely to experience disciplinary problems in school. They equate this to neighborhood pride, better home study environments, less stress, no lead paint, mold, bacteria from roaches from rats and mice. Children need a safe place to learn, grow, play and rest. The question then becomes; with the high cost of housing in the Virgin Islands, how does a family with an

income of \$40,000 (above the median) embrace the American dream of owning or even renovating a decent home for their children?

At Habitat, we believe homeownership is the way to break the cycle of poverty. However, we cannot do it alone. Get involved-together we can make affordable housing in the territory a reality.

### Sources:

- Virgin Islands 2006 Kids Count
- Ohio State Univ. "The Impact of Homeownership on Child Outcomes-2001."

## HFH-VI's Executive Director FOCUSes ON THE FUTURE



HFH-VI's ED Dianne Wells

Habitat for Humanity executive directors and staff from across the US met in New Orleans from October 8 to 12. During the conference, Habitat affiliate leaders

like Dianne Wells had the opportunity to meet and share best practices and to attend a variety of training workshops designed to help increase homebuilding capacity. More than 730 partners attended Habitat's Executive Directors and *Focus on the Future* conferences.

Conference topics varied and covered a wide range of subjects. One of the most popular events was a Construction Day in the Musicians Village and a tour of the devastated Ninth Ward of New Orleans.



A volunteer at the New Orleans Musician Village

According to Larry Gluth, Vice President of Habitat's U. S./Canada Area Office, "These conferences provide affiliate leaders and staff an opportunity to gather to reflect on how their individual efforts have helped thousands of families live in safe, decent and affordable housing and to renew their vision to help additional families for the year ahead." As Executive Director of HFH Trinidad and Tobago, Ms. Wells networked among a smaller Latin American group and felt fortunate to be able to attend this much larger national conference. "I left the conference with a greater sense of **affiliation** and a huge network of peers and corporate donors, now at my fingertips," she reported soon after returning from New Orleans.

"As with most conferences, I left energized and ready to change the world knowing that other Directors - who are now my support base - were faced with the same challenges I encounter on a regular basis," said Ms. Wells. The conference's trainers uploaded all workshop information to PartnerNet, a web-based resource management system for Habitat employees and volunteers. With the use of PartnerNet, our HFH-VI Board and volunteers can also utilize the resources shared at the conference.

Ms. Wells would like to thank the HFH-VI board for the opportunity to attend the conference, the HFHI team for supporting and training the conference attendees, and the city of New Orleans for their stellar hospitality, food, music, and energy.

## Year in Review 2007 HFH-VI Events

January to December

**#4 Adele Gade Construction**

March to July

**USVI National Guard's Engineer Detachment Unit Volunteerism**

Week of March 5

**HFH-VI's 1st Collegiate Challenge**

Students from St. Johns University and University of Connecticut

Summer

**HFH-VI's 2nd Collegiate Challenge**

Students from St. Johns University

June 9

**Spirit to Serve Walk-A-Thon**

To support United Way, Habitat for Humanity of the U. S. Virgin Islands, American Cancer Society, and VI Department of Human Services.

September 16 to 23

**Building on Faith Week**

Share Habitat's vision for local access to safe, decent affordable housing with local churches

September 29 to 30

**Yard Sale**

Proceeds supported the Home Repair Projects Program

## HELP WANTED

**We need volunteers!**

Volunteer Coordinator  
Desktop Publishers  
Fundraisers

Plumbers  
Carpenters  
Electricians

## HFH-VI's First Yard Sale!

During the sweltering weekend of September 29th, 2007, HFH-VI utilized the Creque family's warehouse space across from the Frenchtown Post Office to hold its first Yard Sale. We sold light bulbs, tables, paint, and many more items donated from Home Depot, Frenchmen's Reef, and the greater community. The sale raised a little more than \$1,000 to support the

Home Repair Projects Program.

We hope to continue to have yard sales and ultimately open a "HFH-VI Restore." The "HFH-VI Restore" will be retail shop where our community can buy new, semi-used, and refurbished furniture, fixtures, supplies, etc below

cost. Contact us at 340-714-5678, if you like more information about how you or your organization can support our next Yard Sale or our restore project.



**We have  
light bulbs  
FOR SALE**

## Collegiate Challenge 2007

During spring break 2007, more than 11,500 students signed up to participate in Collegiate Challenge in 235 locations across the USA. The program offers high school and college students, year-round opportunities to use their vacations to serve a community by volunteering to build homes. It also gives students a great chance to travel to a new location and spend time with their friends building a home.

"This past summer students from St. Johns University in Jamaica New York worked alongside other HFH-VI volunteers in March and again in June. We were honored that students from New York gave so much of their holiday time to help construct Habitat's first home at Adele Gade," said HFH-VI Executive Director Dianne Wells.

Throughout its 18-year history, Collegiate Challenge has sent more than 139,000 students to build Habitat houses. Students have raised more than \$11 million since the program began in 1989. This year alone, Collegiate Challenge students will contribute \$1.4 million to help build Habitat houses throughout North America.



Collegiate Challenge Students- March 2007

## The 631st Unit of the National Guard! Thank You For Caring!

Thirteen men and women of the U.S. Virgin Islands National Guard's 631st Engineer Detachment Unit spent a portion of their annual training building #4 Adele Gade. The 631st Detachment Unit works on local construction projects as well as in Germany, Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica. In 2006, they were deployed to New Orleans during the aftermath of Katrina and in November of the same year the Unit worked in New Mexico to erect a 700-mile fence to deter vehicles trying to cross the border illegally. The 631st Detachment Unit was deployed from September 2003 to September 2004 in Afghanistan.

## Meet Ms. Hernandez, HFH-VI's First Homeowner

After 15 years of renting and researching homeownership opportunities, Ms. Celecia Hernandez is finally going to own her own home. A single mother with four children at home, Ms Hernandez is the proud beneficiary of Habitat for Humanity of the Virgin Islands (HFH-VI's) first housing project. "I always dreamed of owning my own home. I came close once, but the problem was qualifying at the bank," said Ms. Hernandez sitting on the front steps of her new home.



Ms. Hernandez on the front stairs of her home

A lien officer in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Ms. Hernandez's hope to own a home began to rise again when she heard that HFH-VI was taking applications. Not knowing that the Habitat house was located just a few doors up from where she was already living on Adele Gade, Ms. Hernandez completed the

application process and months later was contacted for an interview. As they say - the rest is history.

"When my children and I first saw the site, we only saw a crumbling structure that didn't look much like a house," she said. Nevertheless, she had every confidence that HFH-VI had a vision and that they knew what they were doing. "I saw their vision too. Look around, - God has blessed us with a home," she rejoiced. The site of

Ms. Hernandez's three-bedroom home was once the ruins of Ms. Adele Galiber's home which was devastated by hurricanes Hugo and Marilyn.

When speaking about her home, Ms. Hernandez always acknowledges the

help of volunteers. "Throughout the summer we were blessed with many volunteers. The students from St. John University, the National Guard, Vivot, Home Depot and all the many others that I don't know by name. There is a local contractor, Geoff Bailey who has been with me since day one, and of course Construction Committee Chair Alan Fleming, the construction committee and its group of volunteers, Dianne Wells and the entire HFH-VI board of directors," she said.

She commented on the need for skilled volunteers and she praised the local contractors who work tirelessly to help complete her home. "I wish that more contractors would get involved. Habitat needs expertise and commitment from the entire community," she said.

Speaking on HFH-VI's interest free mortgage payments, Ms. Hernandez said, "Habitat has given me an opportunity that government housing and traditional mortgage banking could not."



Phone: (340) 714-5678  
 Fax: (340) 777-5523  
 E-mail: info@Habitat.VI  
 Web: www.Habitat.VI

Habitat-VI is a 501c (3) and as such you will receive a letter of contribution for tax purposes. Our EIN # is 66-0643952.

## HFH-VI Donation Form

(Please Print)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Habitat for Humanity of the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Place  
postage  
stamp here

Corporate Place  
 5600 Royal Dane Mall  
 St. Thomas, USVI 00802



### HFH-VI Thank You Corner

**As a volunteer driven organization, HFH-VI is only effective with the assistance of committed partners - We thank all of you for caring!**

United Way of St. Thomas	Geoff Bailey	Vivot Construction
Jacqueline Dennis	Students of Physics class Antilles School	Sea Star Line
University of the Virgin Islands	Armour Enterprises	Herman Lloyd
VI Department of Human Services	Bill Creque	Samantha Mason
MSI Hardware	Family and Friends of Patricia McCoy	Home Inspector
Ackley Media Group	Students of All Saints High School	Christina Luton
Tech Connect Services	Calypso Realty	Merchants Bank
VI National Guard	Fred Hupprich	VI Police Department
Moneca Pinkett	Clearwater Consulting	Foundation Source
Dinner and A Cause Committee	Steel Plus Hardware	Marriott Hotel
Windward Capital LLC	Diverstgen Group	Haldane Davies, Ph.D.
VI Housing Finance Authority	Home Depot	
Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI)		

### HFH-VI Board of Directors

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### HFH-VI Staff

Dianne Wells, Executive Director  
 Michelle Smitherman, Newsletter Editor  
 Moneca Pinkett, Graphic Designer

**"To whom much is given, much is required," Luke 12:4.**