

Sandtown Habitat for Humanity

Spring 2000

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Dancin' In The Millennium

Fitt Bennett, Volunteer Coordinator, Sandtown Habitat for Humanity

If 25 homes dedicated in the year 1999 isn't enough to make you dance, then maybe the 35 homes that will be completed in the first year of this new millennium will. At least, assistant construction manager Frank Johnson and the Church of the Holy Comforter crew think so (*photo right*). This is just one example of what happens when congregations, foundations, corporations and schools partner with Sandtown Habitat for Humanity. The end result is a decent and affordable home for a family who thought that the idea of homeownership was *just* an idea. This process has been repeated over 150 different times here in the Sandtown community. We're all excited, because having completed their 2nd home, the Church of the Holy Comforter eagerly waits to start their next house in mid-April.



Some think the idea of rebuilding a community with so much hurt and pain is impossible. We here in Sandtown know that it is possible and, in fact, is working. I am speaking not only as Sandtown Habitat staff, but more so as a lifelong resident of Sandtown.

Congregations continue to be the leaders in house sponsorships in Sandtown. You can see the joy of homeowner Natarsha Snowden (1710 Presstman Street) showing off a big smile with sponsors Don Hester and Bill Bonnington from Linden-Linthicum United Methodist Church (*photo left*). Linden-Linthicum in co-sponsorship with Hunt Valley Presbyterian Church just completed 1721 Baker Street.

What's happening with Habitat in Sandtown is not only an encouragement, but a motivation to

keep on going. In a letter to Co-Executive Director LaVerne Stokes, after her testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee, Tom Jones (HFHI Washington Office) stated, "We know that your influence in the Sandtown community extends beyond the walls of Habitat homes and into the hearts of so many of its residents."



From Left to Right:
Priscilla, Bill, Natarsha and Don

Summer Building
Week

June 26-30,
2000

Ms. Bessie Feeds Hungry Staff & Volunteers as Her House is Built

Bessie Littlejohn grew up in Sandtown, living in the 900 blocks of both Stricker and Gilmore Streets. For the past 28 years she rented an apartment on West Franklin Street, until Saturday, March 25, 2000 when she received the keys to her new Habitat home at 707 Cumberland Street. Here's some of what Ms. Bessie shared with staff members Fitt Bennett & Patty Prasada-Rao about becoming a Habitat homeowner:

Q: How did you hear about Sandtown Habitat?

A: Through a friend of mine, Jessie Worrell (a Sandtown Habitat homeowner since 1997).

Q: Why did you want to move back to Sandtown?

A: Because of Habitat and what they were doing in the neighborhood. I used to live in Sandtown and I wanted to go back. And I'm so glad I did!

Q: Why are you glad?

A: I'm seeing Sandtown be rebuilt up all over again. It's starting to look as good as it did years ago, like the Sandtown I remember.

Q: What are some good things that have happened during this process?

A: I've truly met some wonderful people, especially through building week – homeowners, volunteers and Habitat staff. I think I just fell in love with everyone! On Saturdays I fed everyone who came to work on the house. Word got around and people would get on the radios and tell other people that there was food at Ms. Bessie's! [Habitat scoop has it that Ms. Bessie fed at least 25 people every Saturday for a couple of months!! And it didn't stop there - the feast she shared with everyone on her dedication day

included crabcakes, Italian meatballs and shrimp fried rice!]

Q: How was it doing all your sweat equity hours?

A: At first, I thought it was going to be hard. But after the summer building week, everything seemed to fall into place. I loved every minute of it – came out there every week and had over 300 hours done before the house was completed.

Q: What was it like working with so many different people?

A: Some people said that it would be hard to work with all those different volunteers. There could be problems. But everyone gave me respect – both the younger crowd and older ones. I believe that what you do to other people is how they will treat you. I respected them and they respected me.

Q: What is something you remember the most?

A: The most enjoyable experience was when I got to sit down and talk with the family selection committee. I was able to be honest and open with them about my problems, with my family, with my old house, and even my own sickness. I told them that I wanted to have a chance to sit back and relax and to give something to my grandbabies if something happens to me. After talking with them and seeing the love and care in their eyes, I wasn't worried. I had prayed about it

before the meeting and I knew it was going to be okay. When the letter came, I was cooking food for my grandbaby's shower. I didn't see anything else on the page but the word "Congratulations..." and I screamed and hollered. I forgot all about the food. My family came running to see what had happened.

Q: How does it feel to be a homeowner now?

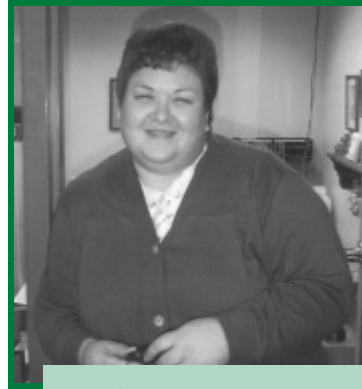
A: Beautiful, just beautiful. I couldn't sleep that first night – kept going all over the house during the night making sure everything was okay. I have my Bible by my bed and just say thank you every day. I sometimes just can't believe this is mine. It feels so good to have something you can call your own. It's much better paying mortgage than rent. If I had to do it over, I'd do it all again. Every time I put my key in the door, I say, "Thank you Jesus!" This wouldn't have happened without Him.



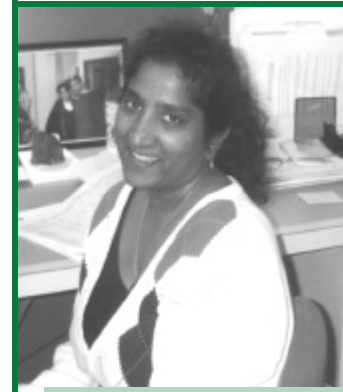
Sandtown Habitat Welcomes New Staff To Our Family



Sherie Sample
Family Support Representative
Favorite Food: Steamed Crabs
Claim to Fame: Appears to have worked here for many years, by the ease and speed with which she's taken over all homeowner support and how many times in a day LaVerne gives thanks that Sherie is on board!



Barbara Baer
Administrative Manager
Favorite Food: Sesame Beef
Claim to Fame: Has found a place for everything in the office, which is looking better than ever, thanks to Barbara!



Patty Prasada-Rao
Director of Resource Development
Favorite Food: Chicken Curry & Coconut Rice
Claim to Fame: Seems to have worked everywhere or to know someone anywhere we go!

Sandtown Habitat Staff in Chicago

The tenth anniversary of the Christian Community Development Association was held in Chicago on November 17-21, 1999. Eighteen Sandtown Habitat staff members along with other New Song staff attended this conference which included speakers and workshops on various issues in community development. Co-Executive Director LaVerne Stokes led a workshop with the rest of the Sandtown Habitat staff focusing on our model of church-based Christian community development, with lively discussion on issues related to John Perkins' three R's - relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution - upon which our model is based.



Employee of the Quarter: Dennis Freeman

Sandtown Habitat for Humanity staff consists of 14 construction staff and 7 administrative staff, one of which is selected every 3 months as “Employee of the Quarter.” This selection is agreed upon by all other staff members. In order to be chosen, he or she must show the ability to perform their duties in an outstanding manner above and beyond what’s required of them. The first “Employee of the Quarter” in this new year goes to Dennis Freeman.

Dennis joined Sandtown Habitat staff in the fall of '97 as an AmeriCorps member. After serving two consecutive terms with AmeriCorps, Dennis was hired as a full-time staff member with Sandtown Habitat in August '99. After working in the electrical department for two years under the training of Orlando Mobuary, Dennis was promoted to the position of Electrical Manager, with Orlando becoming Rehab Construction Manager.

Along with serving as Electrical Manager and training AmeriCorps member Norris Bryant, Dennis oversees volunteer groups on Saturdays in house rehab and

serves as a Site Supervisor for several Habitat homes. Dennis also serves as Sandtown Habitat’s Safety Officer, assisted by Fitt Bennett, with the responsibility of keeping



the staff informed and updated on safety issues and keeping us vigilant when it comes to construction safety.

Dennis became a proud Sandtown Habitat homeowner in January '99 and moved into his home in the 1600 block of North Gilmor Street.

Prior to being employed with Sandtown Habitat, Dennis worked at what he considered a “dead-end job” as a dishwasher. Dennis worked long hard hours to save up to buy a car so that he could have the transportation to get a job in the electrical field. For some odd reason, Dennis always had a love for electrical work. He states that one day, while seeking other employment, he came across a friend (Denise Sample) who told him about an open electrician’s position at Sandtown Habitat. Dennis began by volunteering on a number of Saturdays, where his skills were quickly acknowledged and he was asked to join the staff of Sandtown Habitat.

After obtaining his electrician’s license, Dennis’ goal is to start some type of electrical assistance company that will assist Sandtown residents with their electrical problems and concerns. When asked why, Dennis simply replies, “cuz I love my job and my community”!!!!

Sandtown Habitat Staff in L.A.

Co-Executive Director LaVerne Stokes and Family Support Representative Sherie Sample headed to Manhattan Beach, California for the Habitat 40 Conference, celebrating the accomplishments of the top 40 (out of 1500) affiliates in the U.S. LaVerne shared the Sandtown story in a panel on *Community Development in the Habitat Context*, which led Michael Willard of Habitat for Humanity International to note, “The work that is being done in Sandtown is an example to all affiliates of community building and ownership at its best.”

