



# University of Richmond Puts Advocacy into Action

## From College Classroom to Construction Site

The University of Richmond teamed up with Richmond Habitat and two other organizations this spring to build a Richmond Habitat for Humanity home in the Highland Park neighborhood. The collaboration was an important part of *Build It*, the university's largest sustained community-engagement initiative coordinated by the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). The effort brought together students, faculty and staff from the University of Richmond, Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity, Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA), and Boaz and Ruth, an agency dedicated to successful prisoner re-entry.

The UR Bonner Center for Civic Engagement also planned educational programs on the issues surrounding affordable housing to complement the volunteer effort and educate students on the need for both advocacy and action.

Funding for the home was provided by the University of Richmond, the UR Habitat for Humanity Chapter, and a generous donation by philanthropists Gilbert and Fannie Rosenthal. "The partnership to build the Highland Park house is a historic first," said Leisha LaRiviere, executive director of Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity. "Land for the home was purchased for \$1 from RRHA, and this is the first time Boaz and Ruth volunteers have partnered with RMHFH to help build a Habitat home."

The homeowners, Kelvin and Geraldine Coley, are both graduates of the Boaz and Ruth program. The couple met through Boaz and Ruth, and, together, helped construct the home, along with volunteers from Boaz and Ruth and approximately 275 Richmond students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends.

University of Richmond *Build It* volunteers have been fully engaged in community service projects in Highland Park for the past three years, providing services for Reach Out and Read Virginia, Hotchkiss Community Center, Chandler Middle School, Overby-Sheppard Elementary School, and Boaz and Ruth. Each week, approximately 80-120 students served as tutors, read to children in pediatricians' waiting rooms, served meals and coached youth athletic teams, among other activities. The Highland Park Habitat home build is a significant example of the University's continued commitment to citizens of this neighborhood.



Community partners John Sydnor with RRHA; Leisha LaRiviere with Richmond Habitat; Doug Hicks and Amy Howard with the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement and Edward Ayers, President of the University of Richmond; Martha Rollins with Boaz & Ruth; and Frank Punch of RMHFH gather together at the dedication at the Coley Family's new home at 1205 Highland View Avenue.



The Coley Family at the reception following the dedication of their new home



### Edward L. Ayers, President, University of Richmond Excerpts from his remarks at the Richmond Habitat House Dedication April 19, 2008

Greetings to all of you on this beautiful Saturday in Highland Park. I am honored to be here with our partners from Richmond Habitat for Humanity, Boaz and Ruth, and the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. And to celebrate with the Coleys as you prepare to transform this construction site into a home. Thank you so much for allowing me, and my friends from the University of Richmond, to take part in this dedication. Abby and I enjoyed working here, and meeting the Coleys, last month. I am still sore, in fact, from my hammering. And I'm still glad I didn't fall off the ladder.

Last week in my Inauguration speech, I tried to outline—in twenty short minutes—where we, as the University of Richmond, have come from, and to set a vision for where we are going... One constant throughout our history has been the University's engagement with the citizens of Richmond. Our greatest allies—whether they are financial supporters or employees or graduates—have come from neighborhoods across Richmond, including Highland Park.

The partnerships that made this house build possible have their roots in that history. The University's connection to Richmond Habitat for Humanity is longstanding; we have been one of the most active and productive Habitat campus chapters in the country. In the early nineties, the Bonner Scholars Program arose out of this period of student volunteerism and working with Richmond Habitat for Humanity. The Build It program, the University's largest civic engagement initiative, has solidified our connection to Boaz and Ruth and other Highland Park partners. In this decade, the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement grew out of this history and is enabling us to connect community work to our core educational mission. As we look forward, I am making one of the keystones of my presidency to be not only the University OF Richmond, but increasingly to become the University FOR Richmond. If we are going to build up our contribution to our city and region, we must draw on partnerships like the ones represented by this event—and even more tangibly, by this impressive structure behind me. This house is a great symbol of what our partnerships can accomplish. Together we built this house on a firm foundation—the foundation of our sustained partnerships.

So on this wonderful Saturday in front of this lovely house, I am asking all of you to help me. Our firm foundation for community engagement requires partnerships like this one—with friends and neighbors who are willing to invest themselves and your organizations with us. We have more hammering to do side by side. We have teaching and mentoring of public-school students to do side by side. And we have public conversations about public health, public transportation, and regional development to pursue side by side.

How can we build on this foundation that we have established together? Planning our community engagement requires that we follow the same wise principles that guided this house's construction. We need to draft careful plans. We need to find the right places to build. We will build within our means and follow through on our plans. We need to work with well-trained experts from the University and our partner organizations who know their craft. And we will need many willing citizens—including University students, faculty, staff, and alumni—who will use their energies and talents to make our plans a reality. I will be turning to many of you to help us build on our firm foundation of partnership.