

## BRIEF HISTORY OF TCHFH'S ROOTS ~ by Robert A. Olsen

- ❖ 6/1/81: Bob and Amy Olsen return from Florida after having started the second Habitat affiliate in the USA. \*
- ❖ 6/14/81: Millard Fuller comes to PA, asks Bob, "How many houses have you built in PA? Answer: None, yet!"
- ❖ Slide Show in University Baptist and Brethren Church (UBBC), shortly thereafter, Bob and Amy show slides taken in Immokalee FL, showing conditions under which migrant farm workers picked tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers: Growers treated workers like slaves. Housing appallingly bad, with holes in roofs and floors of houses renting for \$100.00 per week, rats and cockroaches abundant. Workers treated worse than the slaves of a hundred years ago! At conclusion we are asked, "Are you going to start a Habitat affiliate in State College?" Bob answers, "I will if someone wants to help." No one responds.
- ❖ Rose Cologne, six months later, to Bob: "When are you going to do something about housing in State College?" Bob thinks to himself, "Who, me?"
- ❖ 1982: Millard Fuller starts to organize the 700-mile hike from Atlanta to Indianapolis, to celebrate Habitat's seventh anniversary. He asks for someone to contact Habitat supporters in PA. Bob volunteers, asking if he could use Habitat's mailing list to recruit people to help start an affiliate in PA, PA's first. Affirmative.
- ❖ Early 1983: Letters sent out to 700 on HFHI's mailing list for PA. Fifteen or so reply, indicating interest in PA's starting an affiliate. Among those replying: Lorraine Keller, Young People Who Care Mission, Frenchville PA, Colina Jordan, Counseling House, Bellefonte, Lynn Earon, Lock Haven ministry, Rose Cologne, Jon Grindall, and Dave Miller.
- ❖ 1981, 1982, 1983: Slide show/talks to churches in and around State College, Clearfield and Lock Haven.
- ❖ October 1983: Invitation to November 6 meeting at UBBC sent out, indicating that incorporation would be soon. Also indicated that much poor housing exists in this area, not too different than in Florida.
- ❖ October 27, 1983: Bob Olsen, Jon Grindall, and Dave Miller, all of UBBC, incorporated TCHFH.
- ❖ December 6, 1983: Letters sent to friends in Centre, Clearfield and Clinton counties, announcing our incorporation. Pat Casher of the Centre Housing Authority contacted. He is allowed to give us names of several hundred families that are now living in sub-standard housing, but whom he could not help for two and a half years. He has decided to stop taking applications for a while.
- ❖ July 19, 1984: Volume I, Number 1 newsletter is published. Here are pertinent items: Mimi Coppersmith has "smoothed out" our first brochure, free of charge. Tom King has printed it for us at cost. Sent out letters to 100 families now living in sub-standard housing, and have received 40 replies. Dot Wiggins and Cynthia Boyer of the UBBC start to call on these families. Contact holders of Fair Housing stock, receive pledges of stock worth \$10,000, our first successful fund raising effort. Establish the second Sunday of every month as our regular meeting day. Produce a set of slides for Central PA. Offer to show them in every church in the three counties. Suggest to each church that they have a Habitat adviser. Invite churches to come and hear Millard Fuller on November 11, dedicating our first house. Groundbreaking set for 4:30 p.m., followed by a carry-in supper at the UBBC. (At the time of the mailing we had not even purchased the land to be "broken!")
- ❖ Mailing list starts to grow. September 16 is International Day of Prayer and Action for Habitat for Humanity. HFHI sends out 100,000 litanies about the need for housing, all over the county. Several Centre County churches use the litany. Many churches celebrate September 16 as Habitat Sunday, indicating a surging interest in the Habitat idea.
- ❖ October 23, November 25: TV shows featuring Habitat speakers Jimmy Carter, Andrew Young, and Millard Fuller. November issue of HFHI's Kingdom Building contains some tearful, inspiring messages, right from Clarence Jordan's mouth. Clarence wrote, in 1968, (The true purpose of Habitat is) "to discover the blessedness of sharing, the warmth of compassion, the quiet strength of humility, the glow of gentleness, the cleanness of honesty, the peace of justice, the ecstasy of love."
- ❖ February 1985: Description of Central PA's Appalachia ~ "Since 1900, people have been left behind by the technological revolution. ... As strip mining destroyed the beauty of the land, those remaining in Appalachia were destroyed and sank lower and lower into poverty." (Presidential Commission) Many of those applying for Habitat housing know what it means to suffer from shutdowns.
- ❖ February 1985: first Habitat family, the Englerts, chosen for a Habitat house in PA. Now, December 2001, PA has 61 affiliates, and hundreds of Habitat houses.

*\*For more information about Habitat for Humanity, see Bob's recently published book, "The Roots of Immokalee HFH". To order, call 800-422-5914, order #1569, \$5.00.*