

# Charity truly does begin at home

## Mayors get behind Canada Revenue Agency employees' effort to aid Habitat for Humanity

By Mike Mullen  
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Moved to acts of compassion by Hurricane Katrina, Canada Revenue Agency supervisor Mary Donovan and her co-workers have instead turned their thoughts and actions to the needy at home.

Mrs. Donovan, Shalene Losier and Pam Steeves joined five Saint John-area mayors in the Red Room at City Hall Tuesday to announce a \$100,000 "Home for the Holidays" fundraiser that will change the life of one family in the Greater Saint John area by making the dream of home ownership possible. Once constructed it will be the 10th home the local branch of Habitat for Humanity has built since 1997.

The goal, said president Tim Ryan of Habitat for Humanity Saint John Inc., is to provide simple, decent affordable housing to those who would not qualify or be able to afford a conventional mortgage.



*(Peter Walsh/Telegraph-Journal)*

**Tim Ryan, president of Habitat for Humanity.**

"We provide partner families with a hand up, not a hand out," he said. "Our partner families must donate 500 hours of their time in sweat equity and be able to pay an interest-free mortgage. And get this, mortgage money we receive, in turn, is used to build more housing."

Such housing, said Mr. Ryan, allows its owners to go back to school, retrain themselves, improve their employment situation and gain self-esteem.

"Their lives are changed forever," he said, choking up. "And we hope the children who are raised in these homes are changed forever, too."

Grand Bay-Westfield Mayor Grace Losier, chair of the mayors' caucus, made an appeal for the community's support.

She said economic indicators clearly show that the opportunity to attract and retain people in Saint John has never been greater.

"We have a robust, health and expanding economy," she said. "But we all know it takes more than a strong economy to move us forward as a region. We also need to be a socially sound community, one that fosters an inclusive environment, one that offers personal independence for all."

Mrs. Losier said everyone must play a role, and the mayors - Norm McFarlane of Saint John, Bill Bishop of Rothesay, Ron Maloney of Quispamsis and Jim Huttges of St. Martins - were asking people in their communities to get behind the fundraiser in a big way.

"It will take less than a \$1 donation from each community member for us to reach our goal," she said, in encouraging people to get staff members to donate \$1 for every member of their family.

Donations may be dropped off at any area branch of the Bank of Montreal (BMO), the Wave Radio Station, and the McAllister Place, Prince Edward Square and Brunswick Square lotto booths. Simply request that the deposit be made to the BMO under the name Home for the Holidays.

Any persons wishing to make a larger donation can get a tax receipt from the BMO.

Collection boxes will also be available in all the town and city halls and at all NB Liquor outlets.

As Mrs. Donovan and co-workers Shalene Losier and Pam Steeves smiled proudly, Mr. McFarlane lauded them and called the fundraiser "true growth in action."

He also told of how the mayors had got behind what at first was an effort by the CRA employees to raise funds to help build a Habitat for Humanity home for victims of Hurricane Katrina. And how, after the presentation of a report on poverty by Vibrant Communities of Saint John last week, he and Mayor Losier felt to ask the three CRA employees to make a difference locally instead.

Mrs. Donovan said there was no hesitation whatsoever on their part in changing gears.

"I guess Katrina was the catalyst," she said. "But there was such an outpouring from Canada and the rest of the world. (This way) we can help our own family members, our own neighbours right here. It's like neighbour-to-neighbour."

"If we can show this kind of love and compassion to our friends across the border, then why not right here in our hometown," said Shalene Losier, her co-worker.

"We were all seeing reports in the news about the poverty levels (one in four) in Saint John and everything like that," added Ms. Steeves. "So, when the mayors came to us, we thought maybe we should change gears. Maybe it was meant to be."

Shalene Losier said the germ of the idea started with Mrs. Donovan who, after spending several sleepless nights after watching the hundreds of TV images of Katrina's homeless, asked, "How are we going to turn this thing around?"

The idea for asking each person for a dollar to build a Habitat home was arrived at.

"It just took off from there," Mrs. Donovan said, relating how the mayors excitedly came on board and then, in the wake of Hurricane Wilma, the devastating earthquake in Pakistan and the dialogue on Vibrant Communities' report on poverty last week, tweaked the original idea.

"I had a few sleepless nights but I'm sleeping better now," Mrs. Donovan said.