

Tribute to John Sillers “Mr. Habitat”



In 1994 Houston County Habitat for Humanity had been operating for about two years when the Board of Directors attracted a gentleman who would leave his stamp on the organization for many years to come. Mr. John Sillers joined the board and began leading the Saturday construction crew. John is the son of a contractor who built homes. As he grew up, he learned from his dad how to build a house. In 1994 he joined his passion for helping others with his love of home construction. He also enjoyed the additional benefit of being able to teach inexperienced volunteers all he knew about home construction. John chaired the Building and Site Selection Committee and led Saturday construction for many years.

As the volunteer Construction Supervisor, John developed the materials list, sought bids for the best prices and ordered all the materials. Regardless of the weather, hot or cold, he showed up every Saturday to organize volunteers in the myriad of tasks required to build a home. He was the first to arrive and always the last to leave.



As a leading voice on the Houston County Habitat Board of Directors, John mentored other board members as they discovered opportunities to apply their skills. Some were very effective at fundraising while others helped select families and nurture them through their first years of homeownership. In 2002 the Board of Directors decided it needed an Executive Director. John stepped up as volunteer ED. He successfully ran the office and wrote grants. The following year Houston County Habitat received a Capacity Building Grant to hire an Executive Director; John was the obvious choice.

John committed himself totally to this job. In addition to coordinating family selection, writing grants, advocating for affordable housing throughout Houston County, and collecting mortgage payments, he also continued to lead the construction program for several years. During the seven plus years John served as Executive Director, HoCo Habitat built 21 homes. This included homes in Warner Robins, Perry, Hayneville and Houston County.



Church communities are the foundation of the Habitat ministry. John worked tirelessly to build strong relationships with churches throughout Houston County. Through his leadership, several churches funded half or whole-house sponsorships. The Robins Air Force Base Chapel, where John attends, has long been among our strongest supporters. During John's tenure many churches became the heart of HoCo Habitat. In 2008 he brought together 12 churches for a successful Apostles Build.

Through John's leadership HoCo Habitat expanded fundraising efforts with a golf tournament, numerous corporate grants, and the Community Development Block Grant. In 2004 John worked directly with Mayor Donald Walker to leverage Habitat's building capacity to help develop Wellston Villas. This public/private partnership is a 1.6 million dollar Habitat project to build 27 homes to help invest in and revitalize downtown Warner Robins.

I can continue to tell you about John's numerous accomplishments as a Habitat for Humanity leader in Houston County, but I want to share with you some comments from civic leaders and more importantly, Habitat Homeowners. This is where you really get the true measure of the man and his passion to help hard working low income families.



John was instrumental in building Whitney Tran's home in 2001 when her children were in middle school. Tom graduated from the Mercer University School of Pharmacy in 2009 and Kathy graduated from Yale University in 2009 and started Medical School at NYU this fall. Kathy and Tom write, "Just as every home needs a good foundation, an organization like Habitat needs a rock to support it. Mr. John has been one of those rocks. He has made it clear that he is there not only for Habitat, but also for the families as well. For that, we will forever be grateful. These couple of sentences aren't enough to sum up our love for Mr. John - I don't think that any one statement can! But we hope it sums up what a strong force he has been for Habitat, and what a blessing he has been to us homeowners. Many people can't end their day saying: "I've made a difference!" but Mr. John (and so many others at Habitat) can. Mr. John has made a difference in the lives of his volunteers, homeowners, and those in his ESL class too."

Ben and Terry Everett have been involved with HoCo Habitat from the very beginning. Terry remembers when John first started. “John began working with us on either the second or third house, and he was such an inspiration to me. He was having a lot of joint problems, but he continued to faithfully show up and use a little rolling trolley to do wiring and all sorts of things when most folks would have stayed home in bed. John was very knowledgeable about construction, but he was always patient in helping others learn construction skills. He even tried to teach me eye/hand coordination in hammering despite my vision problems and general klutziness! John always involved the house family in all levels of constructing their new home and really made it theirs by letting even the youngest family member do something to help build their house. I will always think of John as "Mr. Habitat.!" John inspired Ben in the same way. Says Ben, “I never saw anyone work as long or as hard building Habitat houses as John Sillers. He truly wanted to help people move ahead with their lives by providing affordable housing. John Sillers is a true gentleman with a desire to share his many skills to help anyone in need”



Laurie Atkins and her five children moved into her Habitat Home in 2000. “A house is just a structure, but I’m so grateful for what Mr. Sillers gave within the walls of these Habitat homes. It’s not what he did with materials, but what he did in the heart of these homes. This structure started a chain and allowed me to open my new home to many foster children. You see, through kindness, decisions, dedication and hard work, Mr. Sillers touched the lives and hearts of many children. The touch of his hand is still at work as my grandchildren come to visit my home.”



Pat Battie moved into her home in 1996. Her children grew up there and this summer she paid off her mortgage! Her son Chris was the sports reporter at WMAZ for several years and now works at a Jacksonville TV station. Pat's daughter, Tiffney, is being married this weekend. Pat says, "John was a strong leader; always the first to arrive and last to leave. He always found a way for children to help and he kept them involved. Even with his severe arthritis, he always worked very hard every Saturday. He invited me to join the Family Selection Committee – that was such a huge inspiration to me that he valued my judgment in selecting families to become Habitat Homeowners."

Eddie Oliver has always managed the Habitat account at Warner Robins Supply: "Mr. John was certainly a wonderful man to work with throughout the years and had a passion for helping others. He is certainly a great example of a Christian and always thinking of others first. I will always remember how when a mistake or problem would occur on a house, with that deep voice he would say: " Well, O.K. Ed, What can we do to fix it?"

After Sarah Dixon moved into her home in 2005, John recruited her to help in the office. She was a tremendous help with many projects. Sarah remembers, "John would out-work all us younger volunteers. He worked so many hours! It seemed like he just didn't want to leave."

Sherman Black met John in 2000. Sherman is still amazed at the number of people who came out to help build his home. As he recalled the experience, "John was always there every Saturday and so patient with all the volunteers. If something got messed up, it never seemed to phase to John – the whole experience was such a blessing."



For many years Dr. Carl Shaw has carefully followed John's service in Houston County. Here are his thoughts about John, "John is among the top 1% of all the people I know. He is the perfect example of what a Christian man ought to be; he is Grade A. His arthritis would be debilitating for most people, but John just gets up every day and without complaint, quietly goes about making a difference in other's lives."

Bob Abbott was a regular volunteer between 2004 and 2009. "I really enjoyed working with John. We worked well together and we had great discussions at lunch and after the day's work was done. Sometimes John would call me up during the week and ask me to meet him at the house to figure out how to solve a problem. I liked those experiences. I really admired John's patience and willingness to teach volunteers. He taught me a lot."



Joe Andrews worked with John to develop our Golf Tournament. John left a very memorable impression on Joe. "John was a man who worked endlessly for the love of helping people and the cause of Habitat. As Colossians 3:23 says, he always gave his best as if working for God not man. I miss working with you, my friend, and may God richly bless you."

Gail Cannon coordinated Saturday lunches for over 5 years. She remembers when John asked her to make a "few" calls to coordinate lunches and "as a result met some of the best people I've ever known. Habitat is filled with willing workers ready to give back. John was certainly one of them. When we all had tasks to share, John was constantly saying "I'll do that", "I'll contact them". He always did way more than his share. I feel blessed to have him as an acquaintance and a friend."



John, the Board of Directors along with our volunteers and homeowners salute your many years of dedication to delivering decent affordable housing in Houston County. Your uncountable hours of hard work have made a huge difference in the lives of so many people. Thank you!

