
Habitat Hero Feature: Meet Mich Estrada

If you haven't met Mich Estrada, then you haven't been to Southwood lately.

Since beginning as the Community Engagement Manager in 2022, Mich has started each day by driving or walking around the community simply to say "hi" to the neighbors he encounters.

"I enjoy talking to families. And obviously, delivering good news!" Mich said when discussing his routine. He takes great pride in bringing community engagement out onto the streets, and estimates he's connected directly with 90% of the 1,300 residents of the mobile home park.



He's most proud of the conversations he's had that have dispelled rumors, built trust and led to families taking proactive steps toward achieving homeownership or a stable rental opportunity at Southwood.

"Empowering families is very important," he said. "If I can get a penny [for] every time I hear 'I don't know if this program is for me...' [I say] there is *always* an option for you. There is always going to be a place for you in Southwood. Just come and talk to us. *Believe* that you can do it."

Nineteen-year Southwood resident Roger Torres was living with doubt that he would be able to stay prior to getting to know Mich. COVID had made communication difficult and impacted the incomes of many Southwood families. However, shortly after meeting Mich on one of his morning *paseos*, Roger came to understand the multiple options he and his family had.

Mich helped turn Roger's doubt into belief and ultimately into unwavering joy when he signed his closing documents this fall and moved his family into their brand new home in Village 1 of the rebuilding community.

"I enjoyed working with (Mich)," said Roger. "He is open and caring with all those he helps."

Roger was inspired by Mich to pay it forward, to continue to work in the community to counsel other residents and inspire trust in better days ahead.

He often volunteers to meet with families and speaks at public events to share his story and spread the word.

“I express my heartfelt thanks to Habitat for spearheading and sponsoring this transformative program,” said Roger at a recent groundbreaking ceremony for the Hickory Hope Apartments being built at Southwood by the Piedmont Housing Alliance. “(Habitat’s) unwavering commitment to creating affordable housing solutions has touched the lives of many, and I am here as living proof of the power of your mission.”



Habitat Hero and Community Engagement Manager Mich Estrada and 19-yr Southwood Resident Roger Torres embrace at the Village I Dedication Ceremony in August 2023

What makes Mich most inspired about working with folks like Roger? “Being a part of a huge project that affects families in positive ways.”

Whether you are a longtime Southwood resident, an organization interested in pitching in, or simply a curious member of the community, Habitat staff is offering tours and open office hours from our Southwood model home.

If you are a Southwood resident who wants to learn more, contact Sarha Suarez on Mich's Community Engagement Team at (434) 202-0805.

If you are a donor, volunteer, or community member outside of Southwood, contact Kelly Eplee on the Advancement team at (434) 953-5249.

Interested but can't make it out? Check out [this recent drone footage](#) that captures our progress.

Next Wave of Village Planning Meetings Underway

Early this month, twelve Southwood families braved a cold winter night to meet over pizza and begin designing the next neighborhood - what will be Village 5 of 11 total. The meeting came on the heels of field trips to local communities to discuss their thoughts about what makes an ideal community. The group now moves into intensive work mode, meeting weekly for three months to produce a site plan to submit for approval to the County of Albemarle. While the site plan is under review, the families will meet one on one with Habitat financial coaches and housing counselors to prepare them to purchase their homes in the new Village 5. Village 5 will consist of a minimum of 30 affordable homes side-by-side with market rate homes and is scheduled for construction in 2026 and 2027.



First Village Planning Meeting for Village 5 on January 11, 2024

Save the Date - Women Build



Mark your calendars for March 8-9th.

Women Build brings together women from across the community to help families build strength, stability and independence. We are calling on the women of Greater Charlottesville to come together to help low-wealth

families in our community build safe, affordable homes. Our goal is to raise \$30,000 to help fund home builds in the Southwood redevelopment and across Greater Charlottesville.

Contact Kelly Eplee at 434-953-5249 for sponsorship opportunities, and stay tuned for build updates!

[Donate](#)

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