



# Habitat for Humanity® of Greater Charlottesville

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December 30, 2024

Dear Friend,

Today, we join the world in mourning the death of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Many of us will join observances around the world to remember his life of service.

Though the history books will focus on the particular successes and challenges during his term as President, I will always cherish how he modeled grace and compassion in the five decades since.

Saint Thomas Aquinas famously said that “no man truly has joy unless he lives in love.” If this is accurate, then very few have experienced as much joy as did President Carter. Rather than leave the White House and fade into obscurity or parlay the position into a second career as a party leader or speech maker, President Carter and Rosalynn chose to live out their lives in big and small but always graceful ways, always with a single-minded focus on service to their fellow human beings – be it through teaching Sunday school in Plains, Georgia or monitoring elections globally.

Most meaningful to me is the fact that the Carters chose to serve as Habitat for Humanity’s most famous volunteers over the 35 years they helped build affordable housing with the organization. Shortly after they left Washington, they began volunteering with Habitat near their home in Plains, Georgia, close to where Habitat was founded decades earlier at Koinonia Farm in Americus. Koinonia began as a simple idea – that we can come together from all walks of life, to work together, to share in the abundance of the harvest and eventually to build homes side by side with our neighbors.

The Carters saw Habitat’s continuation of the spirit of Koinonia as one of the most meaningful ways to lean into their commitment to social justice and basic human rights. They first volunteered near their home in March 1984. Later that same year, they joined Habitat volunteers in New York City’s Lower East Side to renovate an abandoned building in partnership with families in need of affordable housing. That trip marked Habitat for Humanity’s first Jimmy Carter Work Project (later renamed the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project). Each year after, the Carters volunteered with Habitat to build or improve houses alongside homeowners in communities across the United States and around the world. Carter builds are never small feats. The former President and First Lady would help raise funds and garner volunteer support in order to realize audacious goals – such as building 100 homes from scratch in a particular location in a single week.

The Carters’ involvement – in addition to directly helping thousands of families achieve safe, decent and affordable housing – also brought worldwide attention to the growing global housing crisis. Their legacy will live on in every family we serve around the world.

“I think every human being has within himself or herself a desire to reach out to others and to share some of our blessings with those who are in need,” President Carter said. “What’s opened up that avenue for me and my wife and hundreds and thousands of others is Habitat for Humanity. It makes it easy for us to reach out and work side by side with the homeowner who’s never had a decent house, perhaps. I haven’t been on a Habitat project that I wasn’t thrilled and inspired, and wept.”

You see, it was always personal for “Mr. Jimmy” as everyone in Plains called him. My favorite story about his commitment to service comes from former Charlottesville Director of Neighborhood Services Jim Tolbert who, just weeks into his first job in municipal government in Albany, Georgia, was faced with supporting residents after an awful disaster. A flood had wiped out dozens of homes close to the river and the families who lived in them were left with precious few choices. Jim didn’t know what to do or how to help so he looked desperately to the heavens — and soon found his prayers answered. Within minutes, he received an unsolicited call from former President Carter who wanted to help. Within hours of the call, a stunned Tolbert was standing on the riverbank greeting Mr. Jimmy. Then, within weeks, the Carters had raised enough money and gathered enough supporters to come together to completely rebuild the lost homes.

Inspiring millions over the last several decades, President and Mrs. Carter worked alongside more than 104,000 volunteers across the U.S. and in 14 countries to build, renovate and repair 4,390 homes. These efforts amplified our mission. Since its founding in 1976, Habitat has served almost 50 million people around the world.

Locally, President Carter’s ambition to serve, no matter how challenging the situation, always inspired us to think big. Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville has become the most productive Habitat affiliate per our service area size in the Country, this year working on 70 new homes. We have also, like President Carter, stepped in where no one else would, saving thousands of residents from displacement by redeveloping two mobile home parks into inclusive new neighborhoods with a place for everyone. President Carter’s spirit was with us this year as we worked together with the City of Charlottesville, the Piedmont Housing Association, Legal Aid Justice Center and the residents of the Carlton Mobile Home Park to purchase the site and prevent displacement.

In 2016, Habitat named President and Mrs. Carter as the inaugural Habitat Humanitarians for their extraordinary dedication to service in alignment with Habitat’s vision of a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

We are forever grateful for all that President and Mrs. Carter have done to make our world a better place and to inspire us to aim higher, to be better. Today, though sad, we are more committed than ever to continue Mr. Jimmy’s legacy of service.

In solidarity,

Dan Rosensweig  
President and CEO  
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville

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