



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **LIVING LEGACY**

Habitat leader builds on family history and faith  
in a dream “rooted in the American dream”

*House framing 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, April 15-18, 2510 Highcrest Ave., Mapsco 63B*

FORT WORTH—The plans for his grandmother’s house gave Jerry Bradford a design for life.

Built in the 1940s according to a floor plan his grandmother drew up herself, hammered together with the sweat equity of a mother and her teenage sons, that simple, decent house inspired the confidence that carried Bradford through school, college, and law school to a career as a corporate attorney at Alcon Labs and now service as a Trinity Habitat for Humanity volunteer and member of its board of directors.

When he and other Trinity Habitat for Humanity supporters rally April 15 2510 Highcrest Avenue in Fort Worth, they’ll be part of Building on the Dream, a spring campaign to build 14 Habitat houses in tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King’s dream “deeply rooted in the American dream.” Bradford will be building on family history as well.

His faith in decent, affordable housing took root more than half a century ago, when Bradford’s grandmother, Charlsie Mae Franklin, moved from rural Louisiana to the city of Shreveport. A newly divorced mother of seven, she and her youngest two children boarded in the home of a childless couple, and Ms. Franklin worked as a hospital orderly while the landlord’s wife watched over her children.

The daughter of landowners herself, Ms. Franklin saved all she could, enough to buy a plot of land. Then, in that rented room, she drew up the floor plan for a house that would reunite her family of eight. The next step was an extraordinary one in the segregated South of the 1940s, and it was taken on faith in God and her own dream, Bradford said.

“She went to a place called Jeffrey’s Saw Mill and met with the white owner, Mr. Jeffrey. After the meeting, he was so impressed with my grandmother that he extended her the credit that she needed to purchase enough lumber and materials to build her house, according to the plans that she had personally drawn up, out house and all.

“This was unheard of at that time, especially for a black woman with seven children in the South. Eventually the house was built and my mother and all of her siblings were reunited. The house, which stands to this day, is my grandmother’s pride and joy, built from the ground up by her and my uncles’ sweat equity,” he said.

That home remains “one of the prettiest on the block,” painted always in yellow and white and skirted with flowers, Bradford said. In time, his mother and father would set up housekeeping four blocks away, so Bradford visited often. He acquired his grandmother’s love of reading there--and much more.

“I think that I got my sense of hope and belief in the good in people from my grandmother. She and her experience in building her own home are what drive my deeply rooted belief that all people deserve decent, affordable housing. Volunteering with Habitat has given me an opportunity to translate that belief into action. Had it not been for Mr. Jeffrey’s ability to see the content of my grandmother’s character and not the color of her skin, she would not have been able to achieve the American dream of owning a home in which she could raise all of her children. The dream lives on in me,” he said.

It’s a dream that has taken Bradford far from the little house in Shreveport. His parents earned high school equivalency degrees as adults, but Bradford finished school, went on to college and then law school with his grandmother’s words echoing in his mind.

“From her mouth to my ears and yours: ‘if you put your mind to anything, you can do it’,” Bradford said. “It’s like someone just seared into my consciousness that this is the way. (Homeownership) gives us a level of control over our lives ... she owned the place she lived in. My paternal grandmother did not.”

Bradford is himself a homeowner but knows Habitat for Humanity home buyers enjoy a pride of ownership that he does not. “I own a house, but I can’t fathom what it means to say, ‘I hammered that nail; I helped hang that door; I painted that wall.’ I hired someone to do that for me, so I don’t have the true ownership they do,” he said

Bradford, along with all the people of Trinity Habitat for Humanity, builds quality, affordable homes according to a plan that combines volunteer labor with donations of money and materials. Sponsors and donors underwrite construction costs of Habitat for Humanity homes.

Partner families, as Habitat for Humanity home buyers are known, invest 300 hours of sweat equity in the construction of their homes or others' houses, working side by side with volunteers. Partner families then buy their homes, making affordable monthly payments on a no-interest mortgage held by Habitat.

Their house payments revolve back into Habitat for Humanity's work, making homeownership possible for more families. Because Habitat for Humanity is a pay-it-forward housing program, a dollar invested in its work is a buck that never stops--it just keeps building.

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