

MiamiHerald.com 

Posted on Sun, Mar. 23, 2008

## We'll build homes on donated land

The March 17 story *Crime finds a new home* reports about heartbreaking incidents of break-ins and robberies at the new Habitat for Humanity homes in the former Scott-Carver community. Habitat's board and staff, the community partners who volunteered and donated to make these homes a reality and, most important, the new homeowners, all are dismayed by these occurrences.

Yet I don't believe that anyone is shocked or surprised. Sadly, crime is a real issue for everyone in Miami-Dade County, not just the residents of Liberty City or these new homeowners, in particular. Habitat homeowners are not so naive as to think that moving into their homes will prevent crime in their neighborhood. Even the administrative headquarters of Habitat for Humanity, which makes its home in the neighborhood, suffers repeated break-ins. We know that our presence alone will not end crime in the Liberty City/Allapattah neighborhoods. However, with each new home and each business that locates here, a step is made in the right direction. It's a beginning, but it will take much more. Building in the urban core of Miami-Dade County for much of its 19-year history, Miami Habitat has learned that vacant lots are an invitation to crime. Police statistics substantiate the fact that as homes replace vacant lots, crime goes down.

Crime can be reduced by developing vacant land. Habitat hopes that next month the County Commission will approve the donation of 42 scattered lots in the Scott-Carver target area for the construction of affordable homes. Even though Habitat has developed 52 homes in Scott-Carver, more than 30 acres remain to be redeveloped. We and the residents of Miami-Dade should advocate that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development convey these properties to us and/or another builder to develop. Hundreds of families in need would benefit.

The greater community would benefit as well. The properties, now public burdens that are costly to police and maintain, will generate tax dollars; instead of being a drain on public funds, they will increase the tax base. Crime will go down, neighborhoods will be stabilized and families will have a decent, affordable place to build.

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