

# Quietly Changing the World

*Retired Dallas Lawyer Honored by Habitat for Humanity International*

BY JUDY L. MARCHMAN

**Y**ou don't have to look very far to find plenty of people with good things to say about Rex Spivey. And maybe that's because, for the last 21 years, Spivey, a retired lawyer in Dallas, has spent a good portion of his life as a dedicated community volunteer, particularly through Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity.

Now, Spivey is being recognized for his service at the international level. He is one of only two people being honored as a 2011 Volunteer of the Year by Habitat for Humanity International. The Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity is also being honored as the 2011 Affiliate of the Year.

Spivey began as a Habitat volunteer while still practicing as an in-house tax lawyer with Exxon. "Maybe I didn't sleep as much as I should have during those years, but I did not find either work or volunteering to be a burden." Upon his retirement from Exxon in 1998, he immediately started doing more for Habitat.

He is now 70 and has struggled with some health issues, but his enthusiasm for Habitat and its work has not waned one bit. "Habitat gives families a chance at a new start in life," said Spivey. "Volunteering with Habitat got me very quickly, especially once I met the people involved."

Spivey does office work now rather than going to job sites. He is currently helping to develop a comprehensive crisis management plan for Dallas Area Habitat.

Spivey has filled many roles at Dallas Area Habitat, including as a crew chief from 1991 to 1999, serving on the board from 1993 to 1996 and as its chair in 1995, and taking on the position of executive director in 2000–01. He served on the Habitat for Humanity International U.S. Council of Affiliates for six years. He has received numerous awards from the Dallas affiliate and the Dallas community for his service.

"Rex has been a stable force within the affiliate," said Bill Hall, CEO of Dallas Area Habitat. "He's been essential to us to continue moving from who we were to who we are."

Spivey is also directly responsible for getting the Dallas Bar Association (DBA) involved in Habitat for Humanity.

"In 1990, we moved to Dallas when Exxon moved its head-

quarters to Las Colinas," Spivey said. "I joined the Dallas Bar to get involved and got on the Community Involvement Committee. Al Ellis was Dallas Bar president at that time."

Ellis, who is good friends with Spivey and a fellow Habitat volunteer, was looking for a community activity for DBA members. "Rex found Habitat for Humanity and in partnership with Habitat started the DBA Home Project. The rest is history, as they say," Ellis said.

The Dallas Bar Association is now the longest-running annual sponsor of a whole Habitat for Humanity house in the Dallas area. DBA members raised more than one-third of the cost of one house their first year. Then, in 1992, they raised enough funds to build a whole house and have done so every year since. Through his work with the DBA, Spivey, who served on the the bar's board among other roles, has inspired many Dallas lawyers to get hooked on Habitat and on service, in general.

"He quietly goes about changing the world," said Frank Stevenson II, the 2012–13 chair of the State Bar Board of Directors and a longtime friend of Spivey's. "In his life after the law, he has followed his heart to really make a difference."

But if Spivey has served as an inspiration for many of his fellow lawyers, he himself received inspiration in an unusual job site situation from former President Jimmy Carter, Habitat's most prominent supporter.

Spivey was participating in the Jimmy Carter Work Project, a week-long build at one of Habitat's sites around the world. The 1999 project was located in the Philippines. In his years on work sites, Spivey had become quite handy, especially at framing and putting in floor systems, but the Philippines home offered a challenge in putting in the toilet.

"I had not installed the toilet because I was having trouble understanding the instructions, so my crew and I were sitting on the dusty floor having lunch when in walks President Carter," said Spivey, who laughed as he recounted how the former President proceeded to show them how to properly install the toilet. "Within 15 minutes after he left, it was done!" 🌟



*Rex Spivey (left) with Steve Goldmann, a former chair of Dallas Area Habitat, at Habitat for Humanity's Jimmy Carter Work Project in Puebla, Mexico.*