

# habitat<sup>®</sup>

THE MAGAZINE OF HABITAT FOR HUMANITY



## The Carters

Honoring their lives of service

DECEMBER 2024  
habitat.org

# The Carters' commitment



The seeds they sowed while they were alive have only just begun to bear fruit.

When President and Mrs. Carter passed away, Habitat for Humanity lost two of our leading voices and most tireless volunteers.

During my first Carter Work Project, a homeowner shared a sentiment that sums up as well as anything why we do what we do. Outside Mumbai, India, during a joyful house dedication, a man named Aziz draped his arm across the shoulders of one of his new neighbors and said, “We come from different faiths and castes, but now we are brothers.”

It is a memory I carry, and I have met so many Habitat volunteers and supporters who certainly seem to have similar touchstones.

The leadership the Carters invested in Habitat for so many years does not end here. It will simply continue to flourish, not only in the changed lives of the families with whom we partner, but in the changed hearts of all of us who build.

In volunteering with and supporting Habitat for more than 35 years — and through their work with The Carter Center — President and Mrs. Carter brought people together on so many levels.

They were true friends to this ministry and staunch advocates for people everywhere who suffer from poor health and housing, from political oppression, and from the enormous pressures that poverty imposes. They also were the deepest inspiration for countless others who have engaged in our mission, picking up everything from hammers to telephones in the name of affordable housing.

One of President and Mrs. Carter's greatest gifts to Habitat was their servant commitment. Their international profile brought enormous attention to both the need for and the value of the work that Habitat does. But the Carters didn't simply choose to stand in the spotlight that followed them.

Through the years, they slept in tents on Habitat build sites, worked in the heat and cold, took photos with volunteers in torrential downpours, and their spirits never faltered. I am grateful for their example and longstanding commitment to Habitat. We will miss them terribly.

And yet, the seeds they sowed while they were alive — seeds of awareness, of dedication and compassion — have only just begun to bear fruit. The leadership they invested in Habitat for so many years does not end here. It will simply continue to flourish, not only in the changed lives of the families with whom we partner, but in the changed hearts of all of us who build.

**Jonathan T.M. Reckford**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Habitat for Humanity International

## HABITAT'S VISION

A world where everyone has a decent place to live

Driven by the vision that everyone needs a decent place to live, Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 as a grassroots effort on a community farm in southern Georgia. The Christian housing organization has since grown to become a leading global nonprofit working in local communities across all 50 states in the U.S. and in more than 70 countries.

Families and individuals in need of a hand up partner with Habitat to build or improve a place they can call home. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage.

Through financial support, volunteering or adding a voice to support affordable housing, everyone can help families achieve the strength, stability and self-reliance they need to build better lives for themselves.

Through shelter, we empower. To learn more, visit [habitat.org](https://www.habitat.org).

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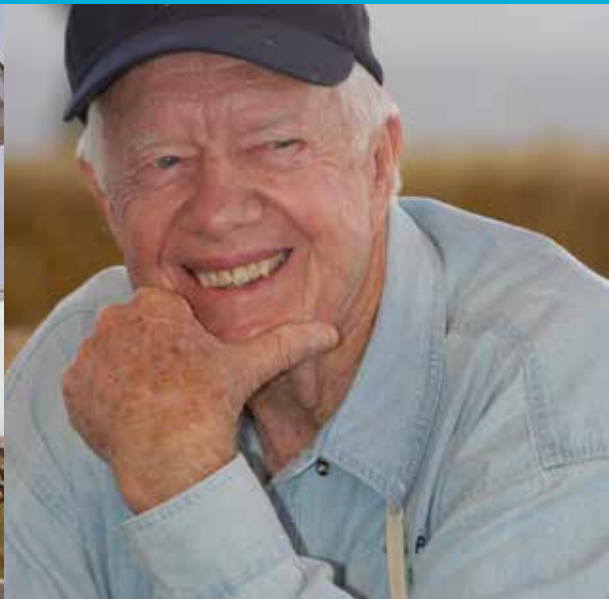
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Now these three remain:  
faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is **love.**

I CORINTHIANS 13:13







## In Memoriam

Those fortunate enough to ever hear President Carter talk about his work with Habitat often saw him do it with a smile on his face and tears in his eyes.

When he was on site, he wanted to build because he enjoyed the tasks – but also because he understood that change could have a blueprint, just like any other construction project. Driving a nail was steering a future. Raising a wall was sounding a call.

The beauty of his spirit, however, was that he never allowed these ideas to become mere abstractions. He was simply pitching in, standing shoulder to shoulder with someone who needed a hand, someone very much like him.

“We’re all the same folks,” he once said.

“We all want the same for our children – a better life, one that’s filled with excitement and challenge and hope and self-respect, a better prospect for the future.”







## In Memoriam

A life of compassion and grace. A heart full of the desire to help others. A faith that drove her to pick up a hammer and help build a better world.

As Habitat for Humanity mourns the loss of Rosalynn Carter, we also honor the many cherished memories that we have of her. We were privileged to receive more than 30 years of steadfast support from this leader, partner and friend. We draw strength from her unshakeable belief that, together, we could — and should — make this a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

Hers was not a long-distance activism. Her optimism and the actions it required were practical and personal. More than most, she understood that the way to truly be of service was to draw alongside a person in need and to help them change their reality from within.

From even before the time she was a nation's first lady, she always spoke out unfailingly on the issues she cared about most — mental health foremost among them. But she also always sought the chance to speak, with trademark quiet kindness, to the real people and families who found themselves living inside those very issues that she was working so hard to address.

In the beginning, she would always fondly recall, she wasn't certain about building with Habitat. She'd never built before, and she wasn't sure she would start now. She'd help, she promised modestly, but maybe with the sandwiches.

She did so much more, finding by the end of that first day in New York City that she had picked up a hammer that was impossible to put down. She once joked that she'd made it to that first build site a little after the former president, so that — when the record was written — it should probably reflect that he'd worked an hour longer than she had.

That one hour notwithstanding, she was always there from then on, side by side with her husband, traveling to build in 14 countries. In 2008, when Habitat renamed our signature event to reflect that role and unveiled the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project, she said — with a smile — “I think it looks pretty nice to have my name up there with Jimmy's.”

They were a powerful duo, and she was his full and equal partner. After the president experienced a health scare during the 2017 build week, Mrs. Carter took to the stage of the closing ceremony to set the record straight. “There has never been,” she said, “any kind of damage at all to Jimmy Carter's heart.” A pause, and then that familiar small, smart smile. “I knew he had a good heart.”

The moment — and the words that followed — revealed the depth of her own.

“I want to thank everybody here,” she continued, “the good hearts in this room. Everybody. Because you would not be here unless you had a good heart, the kind of heart that I'm talking about tonight.”





In my life, I have always struggled and envied people who have figured out a way to make a difference in the world, people who know how to “move the needle.”

I would not have known to call Habitat for Humanity if it wasn't for President Carter and Rosalynn Carter.

It's because of these two people that my friends and I were able to find a way to help in a very, very small way.

I am blessed to be here today with the President and his wife because they have become in their lives a beacon — a beacon to show you what needs to be done and how it can be done.

They changed my life.

**David Letterman**, speaking during the opening ceremonies of the 35th Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project in Indiana



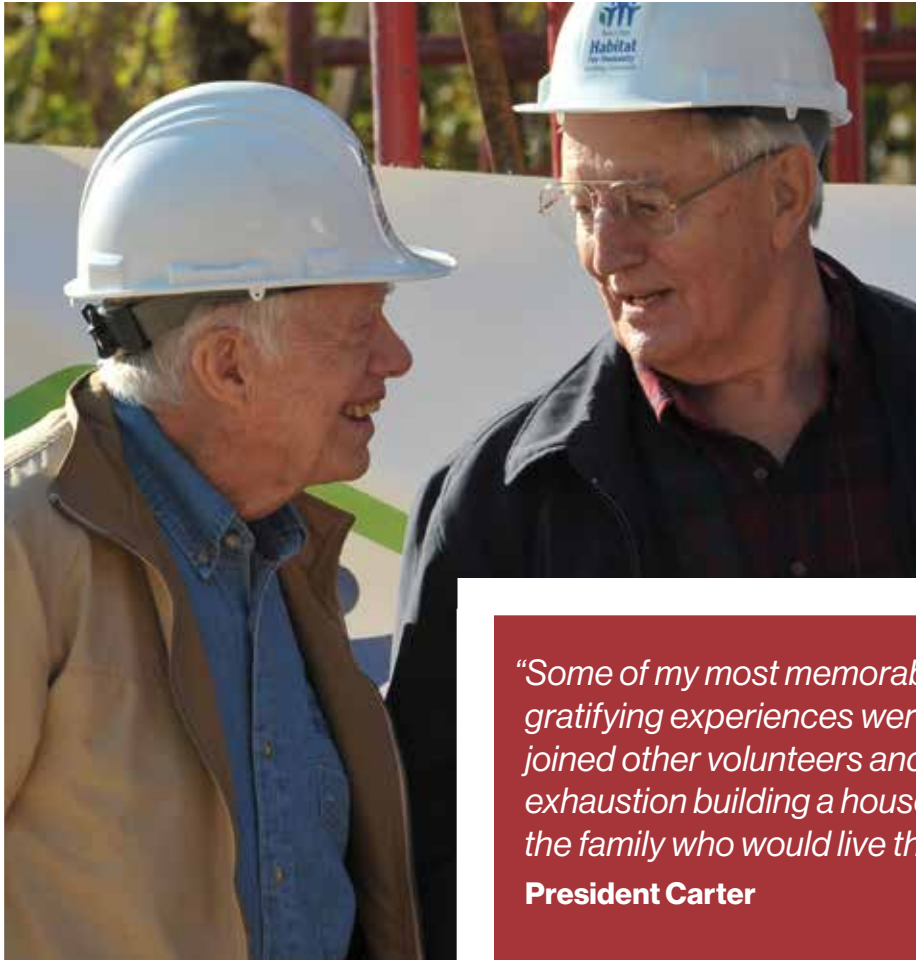
# A heart for housing

Through the years, the Carters worked to build houses – and to bring awareness to the importance of a stable place to call home.

In 1991, President Jimmy Carter called Habitat a “singular, divine concept that has opened a vision to me.”

That vision — a world of house-building people helping each other and themselves — took him to build sites across the United States and around the world.

For more than three decades, the president and former first lady labored alongside those who had also glimpsed the possibility of a world where everyone has a decent place to live.



President Carter brought many to Habitat's work, including his former vice president Walter Mondale, who worked alongside the Carters in Minnesota in 2010.

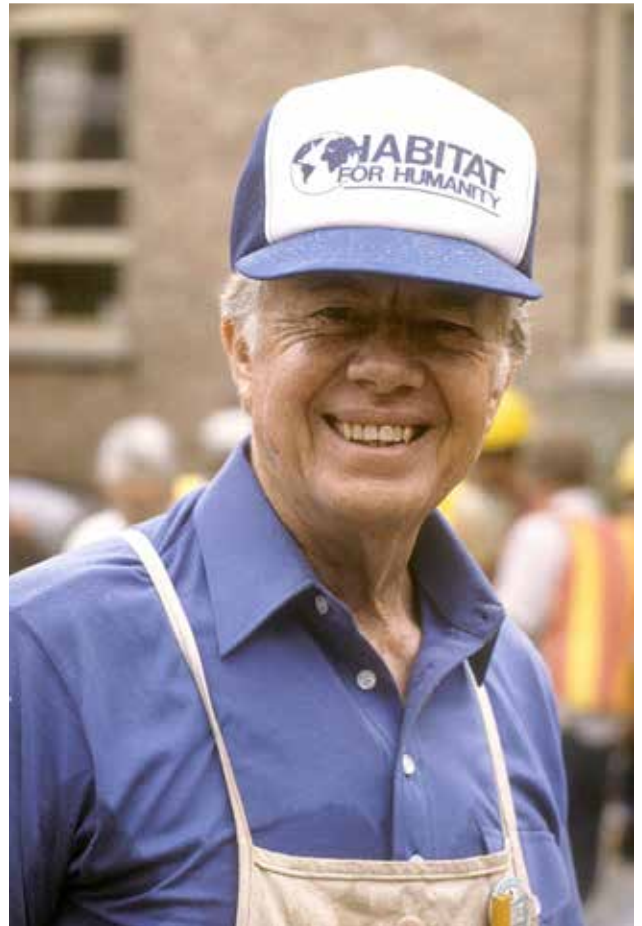


*"Some of my most memorable and gratifying experiences were when I joined other volunteers and worked to exhaustion building a house alongside the family who would live there."*

**President Carter**



President Carter's two calling cards as a Habitat volunteer were tireless advocate and master builder. Above, he encouraged the crowd gathered for a 1985 build in New York City. At right, he joined 150 volunteers in 1986 to build a four-unit townhouse in Chicago.





*"It's being able to help people, but it's also being in a place where everybody wants to do something good. That's what my faith means to me."*

**Rosalynn Carter**

“

On every build site, President and Mrs. Carter made a point to connect with volunteers and homeowner families and to play a very real role in the construction of decent, affordable homes.





Help us remember President and Mrs. Carter  
Sign our online memory books at [habitat.org](http://habitat.org)



Together, President and Mrs. Carter devoted more than 30 years of service to Habitat. The two of them working side by side – as they did here in Charlotte, North Carolina – was a familiar sight to many.

*“One of the basic human rights is housing — the right not only to have a place to live but to have it be your own.”*

**President Carter**









# A carpenter and a builder

President Carter's service to Habitat was an expression of personal faith.

**F**rom a young age, Jimmy Carter watched both his parents faithfully attend church and put the values of fairness, discipline and compassion to work on their farm and in their community.

As Carter moved through life — from the farm to service in the U.S. Navy, then through business, the White House and humanitarian work — the lessons of faith he absorbed at an early age crossed the boundaries of race, income and gender. Beginning in 1984, those lessons found a practical outlet in Habitat for Humanity.

Carter's involvement with Habitat

was an exercise in breaking boundaries in the name of his faith. "I look on Habitat for Humanity as a movement for reconciliation, a breaking down of barriers between people who might be different," he said at the 2001 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project in Assan, South Korea.

An enduring faith in God's love for all enabled him to work with Habitat homeowners and volunteers with the same straightforward authenticity he employed with foreign heads of state.

The pragmatic details of his work — the blocks laid just so, the joints precise and tightly fitted — hinted at the

"Habitat gives all of us a way to transcend a chasm and break through a shell. When we think we've made a sacrifice, with God as my witness, it is never a sacrifice. It is a blessing."



“A lot of times we learn about benevolence, we learn about care, we learn about compassion, we learn about humility, we learn about service, we learn about love, and we talk about it. But Habitat lets us put it all into practice.”

profound motivations of faith and service that characterized his support for Habitat.

“From my rural boyhood, when I often spent the night with Black neighbors who lived in unheated and dilapidated shacks, to my years in the White House when I saw the plight of the homeless and those trapped in poverty housing worldwide, I have known that shelter matters,” he said. “And I know, as a Christian, that I have a responsibility to serve where I can.

“Jesus was a carpenter, and a builder. Through Habitat, we have been privileged to become builders, too, not only of houses, but of families, lives and hope.”





# Building with the Carters

For more than three decades, the annual Carter Work Project has been a bright beacon, calling attention to the cause of affordable housing around the world.



## In 1984,

the eighth year of our existence, President and Mrs. Carter committed to a vision of a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

Since then, in locations around the world, the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project has drawn the world's attention to the critical need for simple, decent and affordable housing.

- 1984, 1985  
New York City
- 1986  
Chicago
- 1987  
Charlotte, N.C.
- 1988  
Philadelphia  
Atlanta
- 1989  
Milwaukee
- 1990  
Tijuana, Mexico  
San Diego
- 1991  
Miami
- 1992  
Washington, D.C.  
Baltimore
- 1993  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Waterloo, Ontario
- 1994  
Eagle Butte, S.D.
- 1995  
Southern California
- 1996  
Vác, Hungary
- 1997  
Eastern Kentucky and Tenn.
- 1998  
Houston
- 1999  
The Philippines
- 2000  
New York City  
Jacksonville, Fla.  
Americus, Ga.
- 2001  
Seoul, South Korea
- 2002  
Durban, South Africa
- 2003  
Anniston, Ala.  
LaGrange and Valdosta, Ga.
- 2004  
Puebla and Veracruz, Mexico
- 2005  
Benton Harbor and Detroit, Mich.  
Windsor, Ontario
- 2006  
Lonavala, India
- 2007  
Los Angeles
- 2008  
U.S. Gulf Coast

# The Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project

2009  
Chiang Mai, Thailand  
Hai Duong, Vietnam  
Srok Por, Kandal province, Cambodia  
Vientiane, Laos  
Zhantun, Yunnan province, China

2010  
Washington, D.C.  
Baltimore and Annapolis, Md.  
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.  
Birmingham, Ala.  
2011, 2012  
Léogâne, Haiti  
2013  
Oakland and San Jose, Calif.  
Denver, Colo.  
New York City

2014  
Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas  
2016  
Memphis, Tenn.  
2017  
Canada  
2018  
St. Joseph County, Ind.  
2019  
Nashville, Tenn.  
2023  
Charlotte, N.C.  
2024  
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.

See more online  
Find Carter Work Project stories and multimedia at [habitat.org](https://www.habitat.org).



“God sent special angels to get this house built. [President Carter] is one wonderful person to work with, building a home. He drives a good nail.”

**ROSETTA, A HABITAT MADISON AND CLARKE COUNTIES HOMEOWNER**



“Five days at 23rd and Walnut in the heart of the city presented an image of renewed hope for the whole city. That image is alive today.”

**RIK DEINES, FORMER HABITAT MILWAUKEE BOARD CHAIR**





“The magic of Habitat is that a bunch of strangers could care enough to donate time, money and energy to build a decent home for a family they never knew. One at a time, whole families gain hope and more.”

**DR. TAN POH TIN, CARTER WORK  
PROJECT PHILIPPINES VOLUNTEER**





“It is amazing to me  
what a group of  
volunteers with their  
hearts in the right place  
can accomplish.”

**VIC FASOLINO, VETERAN OF  
16 CARTER WORK PROJECTS**







“Everyone has a hunger to make our only God-given life significant, to reach out to others less fortunate.”

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER

# 1984

The year the Carters first began building with Habitat



# 4,447

Houses built, repaired and rehabilitated during more than three decades of Carter Work Projects

# 108,100

Volunteers who have participated in Carter Work Projects through the years

# 14

Number of countries that have hosted the Carter Work Project



# 167,279

Miles the Carters traveled to help build houses with Habitat



# legacy

# Working side by side

Working  
side by side  
resulted  
in special  
relationships  
between  
Carter and  
Habitat  
homeowners.

**T**here was always a special connection between Jimmy Carter and the homeowners who live in the houses he helped build.

For many of those homeowners, it might be one of the first housing experiences of their lives in which they feel not simply like a number or the latest in a long line of struggling renters, but a person with a name and a future. For President Carter, getting to know the homeowners was a cherished part of his own personal growth.

“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,” Carter once said. “But it’s one of the most difficult things to do.

“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,” he continued, adding, “I haven’t been on a Habitat



project that I wasn't thrilled and inspired, and wept."

The homeowners so often shared in those emotions. During the 1999 Carter Work Project in the Philippines, as Carter built concrete-block walls in the tropical heat, homeowner Leonisa noticed that drops of his sweat were falling into the mortar. This sight — in light of the years she and her family endured in a bamboo shack — overwhelmed her, and she cried. "Too much blessing from the Lord," she said.

During the 2002 build, Mambo

worked with Carter on his house in Durban, South Africa. The next year, he traveled to Anniston, Alabama, to work with Carter again, this time building a house for someone else. Though the surroundings were different, Carter was the same "humble and down-to-earth" volunteer Mkhize had met previously. "I never expected him to come and help me in South Africa," he says. "What I knew about big people like him — we are here to serve them, not them to serve us."

In 2005, Carter made a statement at the project in Michigan that seemed

to encapsulate much of his perspective toward the homeowners he had built with through decades of involvement with Habitat.

"In every home in which we worked for Habitat, no matter where it is, we have found the homeowner families are just as intelligent and just as hard-working and just as ambitious, and their family values are just as good as mine," Carter said. "I hope during the week that we work side by side with them, that they learned to respect us as equals. Not as superiors, but as equals."

## the lives they helped change



“This home has shaped who I am. To realize that I built this and worked with so many amazing people — how could that not change you and empower you in so many ways?”

**ANGEL, HABITAT HOMEOWNER**





COMING HOME





## “All mankind

is one author, and is one volume. When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and His hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to another.”

**John Donne**, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*



Jimmy & Rosal  
**CARTE**  
WORK PROJ



Visit [habitat.org](https://www.habitat.org) to sign our digital memory books and read more about the Carters' remarkable legacies.