

## **Luncheon Address by Walt Humann Chairman, Jubilee Project**

Inner city communities in this country are in trouble and their populations are rising. Something dramatic must be done.

We can do something dramatic. The private, non-profit and public sectors can work together for a comprehensive action plan. If change is going to occur, only working in unison can impact a community. Leadership is the tie that can bind us all.

Jubilee Park is in the Fair Park neighborhood of South Dallas. The neighborhood is 60% Hispanic and 35% African-American. There is a large number of single-parent households and a high percentage of children.

The neighborhood's turnover is high; there are many renters. The housing quality is mixed and the neighborhood has very poor infrastructure. Dilapidation continues to be a problem. There are few sidewalks, curbs and gutters. There is little retail presence.

This neighborhood is characterized by low-income households, high unemployment, a 25% vacancy of lots, inconsistent housing quality and poor infrastructure. According to the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) superintendent, three years ago the local grade school OM Roberts was the lowest-performing grade school in the city. It has had five principals in the past six years and one-third of the students who started school there are gone by fourth grade. In south Dallas generally, 25% of high school students graduate and 25% of them are on parole.

South Dallas has 65% of the city's developable land yet only 13% of businesses are located there. 41% of Dallas' population lives there. The unemployment rate is 50% versus the city's overall rate of 4%, and income level is \$15,000 per capita versus the city's \$25,000 per capita. The median home value is \$35,000 versus \$180,000 for the rest of Dallas.

There is not an easy or quick fix solution to redeveloping a community. Jubilee's primary strategy is to use private funds and volunteers. My church, Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, established the Jubilee Project as a gift to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the church's founding. It adopted a 62-block neighborhood and established committees to address every key element of community development. Good leadership is central to moving the process forward.

Inner city communities have good people with strong potential to control their own destinies. But many are so far behind the "power curve" that extraordinary outside help is needed.

Jubilee has been a noble experiment. It started over eight years ago, and we are going to stay the course. But we cannot claim success, only a determination to help revitalize the area and continue this “work in progress.”

Communities deteriorate because of disinvestment; new capital is not coming in. We need to reverse the downward cycle.

The action steps that moved Jubilee forward in the community development process included:

- Conducting a master plan,
- Creating an action plan for the physical improvement of the neighborhood, including buying the land and then building a large park in the center of the neighborhood,
- Creating a neighborhood identity and pride (such as “Jubilee Park” on area street signs”),
- Jubilee Park is a resident-driven initiative, especially in the development of the master plan. The volunteers’ role is to assist residents’ efforts, and
- Attracting capital into the area, such as locating a bank branch.

The Park which Jubilee built is at the geometric center of the neighborhood. We purchased 50 lots with cash and donations. There was suspicion in the community about our initiative, but something needed to be done to provide a place for kids to play and serve as a focal point for revitalization efforts.

Because of our investment, the City of Dallas accelerated their neighborhood infrastructure improvement program by 10 years. They have done a good job.

The goal is to interconnect the private, public and non-profits sectors.

A serious problem in the neighborhood is the influx of ex offenders. 650 ex offenders enter the Dallas area each month. We need to get them out of that vicious cycle. They need to get a job or else they will readily revert back to the criminal lifestyle. Job training programs are a crucial component of addressing this.

Individual medical, dental and mental health problems are enormous in areas like the Jubilee Park community. Doctors, dentists, public health workers and others can significantly help. Jubilee Park has a *public health* task force to bring structure to volunteer and paid efforts. The task force has hired a licensed social worker and Jubilee recently received a private grant to provide immediate medical and dental attention to those in need.

Jubilee has a *housing* task force. It is responsible for:

- Buying lots on which non-profit and for-profit home builders can provide affordable housing, including elder-friendly residential facilities, and
- Assisting in home fix-up, spurring owner-occupied rehabilitation.

Acquiring lots in Jubilee is a big problem because it is time-consuming finding who has legal title, identifying the rightful owners, removing liens, convincing the owners to sell and curtailing speculation. In order to maintain good and decent affordable housing, Jubilee is working with several housing non-profit corporations to develop residential properties. Sustainability is insured by imposing deed restrictions on the properties in order to maintain their affordability.

Jubilee also has an *employment* task force. Having a job will solve a lot of social ills. Unemployment is caused by a lack of education and skills, including English language skills. Ex-offenders that settle in the neighborhood are likely to resort to crime if they do not get a job. Jubilee is teaching GED, English and computer skills.

There has been progress at OM Roberts school, but much more must be done. . .there and in other public schools throughout the country. Our society has made a determination that it is permissible and appropriate to pay CEOs and world-class athletes a thousand times more than we pay world-class teachers. And yet each teacher can positively affect thousands of lives. Teachers need to be paid a decent salary because of the difference they make in people's lives.

OM Roberts Elementary School went from being recognized as the worst school in the Dallas Independent School District to one in which 83% of its students passed the TAKS test. Governor Perry gave special recognition to eight schools in Dallas that provided teacher incentives. OM Roberts is one of those schools. Jubilee's goal is to help OM Roberts become one of the top public elementary schools in the state and keep it on top.

Creating a livable community all begins with early childhood education programs like the David's Place Head Start programs. This Head Start school was built by Jubilee. In the public school, teachers are making an impact and Jubilee gives incentives to the best teachers to continue their efforts.

Drugs are a driving force in the Jubilee community. Most of the crimes in the area are drug-related. 80% of residents report being victims of personal crime within the past year. When Jubilee raised money for and then hired a private protection agency to patrol the neighborhood, crime went down. When Jubilee ran out of money to continue the patrol, crime went back up. Jubilee then raised more money and hired off-duty police officers. Once again, crime went down until Jubilee ran out of money to continue the patrol.

The Dallas Police Department has seized over 1,100 grams of crack cocaine in the last 13 months. Arrests have been made, but there have been murders and an armed robbery in the Jubilee Center. We don't have unlimited funds.

Jubilee is working in partnership with the Dallas Police Department on new, innovative approaches. Unfortunately, the Dallas Police Department is undermanned by 750 police officers. So help will also have to come from residents and Jubilee.

We are losing the war on drugs and its related problems. This is where we need unified leadership. We are going to change the culture of people not getting involved. We must get people to partner with the police and call 9-1-1 when there is a big problem. We are exploring an integrated, community-wide surveillance system located at key public points. The partnership would include major businesses, schools, Jubilee Center locations, the Dallas police and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Jubilee hopes to be very successful in this coordinated effort, but is concerned that this effort will merely push the bad guys to another area in Dallas.

I believe that America is losing the War on Drugs. We had better take some unique, unconventional steps because it is tearing apart the fabric of inner-city communities. The cost of drug crime is enormous and the toll on people is even greater, causing mental trauma, pain and suffering.

Working together we can affect change. It's up to me, you and the volunteers because it cannot be done by public officials or residents alone. The wonderful thing is that very often we volunteers are changed more by the experience of giving freely than are the people we seek to help.

I'll close with this poem that illustrates the point for me.

“I sought my God, but my God I could not see;  
I sought my soul, but my soul eluded me;  
I sought to help my fellow man, and I found all three.”

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Accomplishments: Jubilee has created. . .

- Outreach programs at the Jubilee Center
- Building of the Jubilee Park, in the center of the neighborhood, now also called “Jubilee Park”
- Partnership for Educational Excellence with DISD
- David’s Place Head Start Center
- Jubilee Anti-Crime Task Force
- Community Master Plan
- Renewal projects based on the master plan
- Infrastructure improvements to most of the streets
- Owner-occupied rehabilitation improvements

*The views expressed here are the presenter’s and should not be attributed to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas or the Federal Reserve System.*