

# Habitat Newark Honors “Homeowners of the Year”

*Habitat Homeowners Recognized for Outreach at Habitat Gala*

**NEWARK, N.J. – June 5, 2009** – Habitat for Humanity Newark has built homes for 70 families, many of whom have gone on to become vital supporters of the non-profit organization. Habitat Newark has honored two of those homeowners – Shirley Thomas and Donna Thompson – for their tireless efforts.

Thomas and Thompson were among the four original Habitat Newark homeowners to move into Habitat for Humanity’s first building in Newark.

“After completing the hard work of helping to build their own homes, these ladies could have been satisfied that they had done their share,” said David Zurheide, Executive Director of Habitat Newark. “Instead, they went on to do everything they could to reach out to the larger community to recruit volunteers, attract donors, raise awareness and help Habitat Newark grow into the substantial organization it has become.”

## **About Shirley Thomas**

In 1986, when Thomas saw that Habitat for Humanity was opening its doors in Newark to provide housing for low-income families, she couldn’t wait to submit her application.

The single mother of seven had been living in substandard housing for 12 years. Two doors down from her, a family had died in a fire caused by the same electric heaters Thomas used to keep her family warm. She was desperate for a way out.

Thomas’ family was one of the original four chosen by Habitat Newark for their first project, renovating an abandoned building on the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> street and South Orange Avenue. When she arrived on the construction site, she learned that she would be doing much of the hard work herself. She began working and kept working, even though it took five years for the renovation to be completed.

Since then, Thomas has become a prominent face of Habitat Newark, giving interviews to the press, meeting with prospective homeowners, and speaking at volunteer orientations.

She gives back to her community by volunteering her time and energy to Habitat as well as other worthy organizations, such as Toys for Tots and Back to School.

## **About Donna Thompson**

Thompson was living in the Hayes House project in Newark in 1985 when she learned about Habitat for Humanity. She was married with four children and spent her Saturdays for two years working to help Habitat Newark complete that first project.

According to Thompson, Habitat has changed the way that she views life. She takes great pride in what she’s been able to accomplish and has become a self-described home improvement enthusiast, learning about electrical work, plumbing, landscaping and energy conservation through monthly seminars Habitat provides to its homeowners.

She says she feels like a pioneer, putting down roots in a home she built herself.

Since becoming a Habitat Homeowner, Thompson has traveled around the East Coast speaking on behalf of Habitat in places like Boston, Atlanta and New York.

Work on that first building was a long process, but since then, Habitat Newark has grown from a small inexperienced organization into the professional entity it is today. The organization builds better homes more quickly, thanks to a volunteer base that includes corporations, religious institutions, schools and thousands of skilled trades people.

It has come a long way from the few families who worked shoulder to shoulder for five years to make Habitat Newark's first homes a reality. Habitat Newark is now branching out to other parts of Newark and to West Orange, offering hard working low income families a hand up to decent living conditions.



Pictured above at the 2009 Raising Roofs Gala are Jeff Farrell, President of HFHN Board of Directors, Donna Thompson, Shirley Thomas and David Zurheide, Executive Director HFHN.

For more information on Habitat Newark, or to make a donation, please visit [www.habitatnewark.org](http://www.habitatnewark.org) or call 973-624-3330.