

# Join '400 for 400' and help change Greenville

By Don Oglesby

**H**ave you ever taken a wrong turn, and after looking around found that your reflex was to check your door locks, just to "be sure"? How about when you drive by Triune Mercy Center, or Miracle Hill Rescue Mission? What goes through your mind when you see homeless men standing on the sidewalk there? Still checking your door locks?

Our reflexes are meant to protect us, but in reality, they can expose us to greater danger — assumptions about people based on fear.

Fourteen years ago when Homes of Hope was founded, we discovered these rampant assumptions and decided to do something about them.

Through community and housing development, as well as our job training program for men overcoming addictions, we learned about the people we wanted to serve. We learned that they were absolutely no different than us. We learned about their hopes and dreams but more profoundly we learned about their resolve. We learned more from them at

times than we ever hoped to teach them.

One assumption that is still rampant today is that people who are low-income or homeless or substance abusers are completely unfamiliar with two people. We assume that they don't know Jesus and that they don't know Jack! We found that many of them indeed knew Jesus and many of them also knew more things about surviving and principles of living than we did!

Sometimes they didn't. Either way, we learned how to provide them an atmosphere for empowering themselves! Through community and housing development we learned to not just build a house here and there, but to create attractive developments of energy efficient homes that didn't look like your run-of-the-mill "affordable housing." We saw entire neighborhoods transformed as we eliminated dead-end streets and pockets of crime. As a result neighborhoods were more connected and unified; folks were on their porches again.

We learned the importance of building relationships with the families we housed and the

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Don Oglesby is the president and CEO of Homes of Hope, a nonprofit affordable housing developer located in Greenville. For more information go to [www.homesofhope.org](http://www.homesofhope.org).

need to help with things like budgeting, banking and building savings, or connecting them with resources for education improvement, specialized job training or other life-skills.

We also learned that a man committed to addiction-free living and to new life in Christ was still not fully equipped

upon his graduation from our programs without reliable and affordable transportation, education improvement, affordable and energy efficient housing, and a living-wage job.

We learned all of this by moving beyond our reflexes and assumptions and by intentionally deciding to invest ourselves in the lives of good people deserving an opportunity. On Jan. 31 we will complete our 400th home — but more importantly we will have helped our 400th family!

We will also graduate our 279th man from our program for men overcoming addictions. Of those 400 homes, 108 of them were built in the West Greenville neighborhood that borders downtown. Since then, that neighborhood has seen its crime rate reduced drastically and market-rate home buyers are now choosing to build and own homes there!

In celebration of our 400th family housed, we are beginning to raise funds for the next 400. Our "400 for 400" campaign seeks to find 400 donors of any amount to celebrate our 400th home with a financial goal of \$28,000. This amount is the equivalent of a sponsorship

of one LoCAL House — our newest housing venture designed for families in poverty, giving them the opportunity for asset growth, many times for the first time in their lives. LoCAL homes also prepare our men for the job market by providing specialized on-the-job training in green building, which leads to living-wage jobs — which are crucial to their success.

Join the celebration by going to our website [www.homesofhope.org](http://www.homesofhope.org) and becoming one of the "400 for 400" we seek. Also, please consider joining us at 438 Perry Avenue on Jan. 31 for the ribbon cutting breakfast (free to all) showcasing our 399th and 400th homes, which are also our first 2 LoCAL homes.

Right in the heart of West Greenville you will witness great evidence of our work in the neighborhood once known to concern folks like us — the ones checking their locks as they drove through. We're glad we didn't speed quickly away because 14 years later, the celebration of 400 families has become a remarkable destination. Be a part of this journey; help us house 400 more.