



## **Habitat Home for Gulf Coast Family Dedicated Partnership Represents Historic First for the Region**

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority recently made history when it became the first organization of its kind to build a home for a Hurricane Katrina-displaced South Mississippi family. The historic effort, which is part of the Sorority's international program, is made possible through a partnership with Habitat for Humanity Gulf Coast.

The dedication of the home took place Tuesday, July 17, 2007, in Gulfport, MS. The new residents are Katina and Raynard Willis and their six children, who are currently living in a three-bedroom apartment with only one bathroom. The family, which was uprooted and temporarily displaced, has struggled to regain a "normal" life since the hurricane. Despite the challenges, the hard-working couple—who are employed as a forklift operator and a substitute teacher respectively—has kept the family stable. Under their guidance, the children, who range in age from 8-19, are active in the Boys and Girls Club of the Gulf Coast and participate in various school activities.

The new Alpha Kappa Alpha-Habitat for Humanity-sponsored home has five bedrooms, two complete baths, a country kitchen, a large living room, a dining area and a laundry room that will easily accommodate the family's needs.

In addition to the Willis family, attending the dedication were: International President Barbara A. McKinzie; Dr. Juanita Sims-Doty, South Eastern Region Director; Loann Honesty King, International Program Chairman; and members of Alpha Kappa Alpha's board of directors. Sorority members from Theta Zeta Omega (Ocean Springs) and Upsilon Chi Omega (Gulfport) Chapters, who worked tirelessly to assist in building the new home, also attended the dedication.

Alpha Kappa Alpha was among the first responders when Hurricane Katrina hit. In its aftermath, the Sorority quickly established a Disaster Relief Fund to assist its members and others in the region affected by the storm. The home-building and disaster-relief mission was orchestrated by the International Program Committee and committee members were among those who attended the dedication.

Undaunted by the challenge, energized and inspired Sorority members distributed supplies, provided aid and donated money to help individuals and families impacted by this catastrophe. Sponsoring the Habitat for Humanity home is part of the resolve to help the Gulf Coast area.

Observed the Sorority's international president, "Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority is pleased to be the first to underwrite a Habitat for Humanity home. Through this partnership, we are doing our part to help those impacted by the unfortunate chain of events get back on their feet."

McKinzie noted that nearly two years after this devastating natural disaster, there are still many families who are homeless and hopeless as they try to recover from the loss of property and loved ones. "We are doing what we can to help bring stability and economic independence back in their lives."

Added Doty, "The impact of Hurricane Katrina is still very prevalent in Gulf Coast communities, and hundreds of Alpha Kappa Alpha women around the world have stepped up by giving of their time, finances and other resources. Sponsoring this house and giving this family a new home and hope parallel our service mission. Our region, which embraces Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama, is very proud to give back in this way."

Katina Willis expressed appreciation to the Sorority for its generosity. "I am overwhelmed and humbled by Alpha Kappa Alpha's and Habitat for Humanity's generosity. Everyone has played a role in building this house, and Raynard and I are overcome with gratitude. The children are also very happy, and we look forward to starting life anew thanks to Alpha Kappa Alpha and Habitat for Humanity."

*Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority is America's first Greek-letter organization founded in 1908 by, and for, Black college women. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, it is one of the world's leading service organizations. The Sorority serves all mankind through a nucleus of more than 200,000 women in over 975 chapters in the U.S., the Caribbean, Canada, Germany, Korea, Japan and Africa. The Sorority commemorates its Centennial in 1908 with a birthday celebration in January at its founding home—Howard University—and with its Centennial Conference in July, where more than 20,000 members are expected to converge for this 100-year milestone.*

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