

## **HOMEAID HOUSTON'S NEW PROJECT GIVES HOPE TO HOMELESS BOYS AND GIRLS**

After an in-depth study and committee review, HomeAid Houston has selected Boys and Girls Harbor as one of a number of projects slated for construction in 2007. The review process concluded with a detailed presentation by Boys and Girls Harbor representatives that helped to put a face on the 100 boys and girls whose lives are enriched by the program every year.

Members of the HomeAid Houston Board of Directors were impressed with the mission of Boys and Girls Harbor. Since operations began 60 years ago, the organization has been committed to providing healthy, comprehensive care for children and families in crisis. For children who are experiencing family hardship, neglect, abandonment or abuse, the Harbor provides a family environment in a home setting. Through its programs, the Harbor strives to help children learn to overcome self-destructive patterns, break cycles of abuse, develop social skills, learn responsibility and work toward becoming healthy, happy and productive members of society.

The true essence of life at the Harbor is children living in a family environment with house parents. Up to eight boys or girls, ages five to 18 years, live in one of nine residential homes. Each home is staffed by trained houseparents, many of whom have children of their own. The program is designed to give each new arrival a feeling of security, because until that happens there cannot be any adjustment or growth. Each child learns what is expected in terms of rules, routines, limits and boundaries. There are many success stories that have come out of Boys and Girls Harbor. One story was shared at the HomeAid Board of Directors' meeting in January. Kristopher Stockberger was not able to live at home with his mother, so he took up residence at the Harbor in 1977 at the age of five, and lived there until he was 12.

"At the Harbor, I usually did my homework and chores whenever I had to," Kris said. "I played soccer and basketball whenever I could, and sometimes even when I was supposed to be doing chores or homework. At an early age, the excitement of competition and success was my breakfast, lunch and dinner. Track meets, soccer, basketball, spelling bees – anything that gave me an honest shot at winning filled my appetite to do admirable things. And I did those things and forgot that I didn't have a traditional family at home like the other children in school."

At 12, Kris left the Harbor to live with his mother for a period of several years involving several different schools, several different houses and a growing desire to be a different kind of champion – a guitar-playing rock star. By the time he entered high school, he was living with his grandmother. Kris inherited a violin by sheer luck, which inspired him to try a different approach to music. By his second year of high school, studying and composing traditional classical music took up most of his time. He applied to study music at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts and was accepted. He received a full scholarship from the Westheimer Street Festival to study music composition at the Tanglewood Summer Institute in Massachusetts, and studied music with the best of the best for that age group, including the children of famous musicians and Julliard professors.

By graduation, Kris developed interests beyond music, and turned down scholarships to study music at New York University and Boston University. He spent his first year of college at the University of Houston in its Honors Program. "During that year, I elected for a life that would give me the type of competition that had made my childhood exciting and that would also allow me to help other people. I transferred to the University of Texas and majored in both Math and Philosophy. I then worked for a year to prove that I could make it on my own."

After a year in the working world full time, Kris returned to school to obtain his law degree from the University of Texas. He has worked at Brown Sims as a business trial attorney for more than five years and has taken cases to trial and appeal.

The children at Boys and Girls Harbor share the same dreams as children with traditional home environments. The Harbor is a pathway to helping these children realize their dreams. Providing additional beds is essential for keeping up with the number of referrals Boys and Girls Harbor receives from both Child Protective Services and other sources. In 2006, the Harbor operated at or near the current capacity of 70 children, while there were a number of

times when they could not accept new referrals due to a lack of beds. The figures from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services showed more than 38,000 reported cases of child abuse and neglect in the Houston area during its 2005 fiscal year. This number has increasing statewide over the last four years, with Houston being the second largest region for the number of reported cases of child abuse and neglect in Texas.

An ambitious improvement plan has been underway at Boys and Girls Harbor to add a total of six new homes. Two have already been completed, two are currently under construction, and the final two are the new 2007 Project for HomeAid Houston. The two homes will allow an additional 16 youths to join the program.

During the January meeting with the Harbor, Lenny Dalton, founder and CEO of DakotaBlue Homes committed to join the Project as builder captain. He and his company are donating the construction of both homes. Each home will be approximately 4,200 square feet.

“When we first reviewed the application for Boys and Girls Harbor, we knew we had a historically solid, financially sound organization to work with,” said Kathleen Stadler, president of the HomeAid Houston Board of Directors. “When we toured the campus, we fell in love with the organization, the kids and the people who work so hard to deliver loving care to these children. Finally, when Boys and Girls Harbor made their presentation to our board and Lenny Dalton of DakotaBlue homes, we were delighted when Lenny offered to build not one house, as they were proposing, but two homes.”

“The Harbor is a wonderful organization that makes enhancing the lives of children its primary goal,” said Dalton. “I have five children of my own and they are central to everything I do. I am proud to be able to help Boys and Girls Harbor by providing much needed homes for their kids.”

DakotaBlue Homes builds in 10 communities throughout the Houston area with prices ranging from the \$100s to more than \$300,000.

For more information on the Boys and Girls Harbor project, visit [www.homeaidhouston.org](http://www.homeaidhouston.org).