

# Waco Community Development

*"Helping to inspire and cultivate healthy neighborhoods."*

August 2012



## More Than Just the Three R's

By: Ryn Farmer

"I want to find a better job. Without a GED you can't get nothin'", stated Maria, a young single mother who wants to continue her education. Her friend Anthony had a similar sentiment, "I'm trying to enroll in school and better my life. I want to go into nursing and the medical field." Several months ago, leaders in East Waco recalled neighbors who had voiced these desires as they met to develop plans for a General Educational Development (GED) site in their community. At the time, there was not a single GED site in East Waco, so it limited the opportunity for individuals within the community to attend class. The group met for three months and spent time developing a program that would be *more than just a place to learn math, science, social studies, reading, and writing*. They wanted to create an environment in which the students felt welcomed and encouraged. They desired a setting where the students could receive one-on-one tutoring and mentoring from community members and be successful in achieving their GED.

The GED site is administered through McLennan Community College's Adult Education program but it is more than just one institution reaching out in the community. It is a beautiful example of what collaboration looks like when a group of individuals, churches and organizations come together to create a program or project that benefits the community. The collaborators include Carver Park Baptist Church, Greater Waco Education Alliance, Living Word Church of God in Christ, McLennan Community College Adult Education, Restoration Haven, St. Luke A.M.E. Church, St. James United Methodist Church, Waco Community Development and the Waco Housing Authority at Estella Maxey.

The students just completed their third week of class. Their reasons for enrolling are varied; however, the commonality among the group is that they want something more from life. One young woman said, "It's really fun... I like to learn." Another student has not been in a classroom since middle school. He stated, "I'm tired of having a sixth grade education and I really want to get my GED." Some enrolled because they want to set an example for their children. A single mother who attends class stated, "I'm here for me and my kids. For the betterment of my kids." Another said, "Cuz if I go to school, it will help my kids go to school. They tell me, 'Mom, you need to do your homework!'" All of the students are working diligently to learn the material while the community continues to support them in their efforts.

The East Waco community has joined the recent buzz about advertising the opportunities that are available for adults who want to go back to school. These combined efforts encourage community members to pursue educational goals that previously seemed impossible to reach. Remember: It is never too late to go back to school!

## CALENDAR

### Classes

#### **2012 Financial Literacy**

6-8 PM for 6 weeks

Next class series

begins September 6th

#### **Homebuyer Education II**

Next class will begin

September 15th

1-6 PM

#### **SATURDAY Series**

#### **Financial Literacy**

September 22nd and 29th

11:00am—2:00pm

Classes are free!

To register call:

(254) 235-7358

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The newsletter of Waco Community Development whose mission is to help inspire and cultivate healthy neighborhoods throughout Waco.

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## Housewarming & Homecoming

“Please receive warm greetings from your new neighbors, Fernando and Rosa [names changed], now that we form part of this neighborhood . . . Thanks to God, we achieved the dream of buying this house with the help of all the people who collaborated with us. God bless them for their help.” So began Rosa’s speech at her Waco CD housewarming earlier this summer.

As their housing counselor, I have had the privilege of supporting Rosa and Fernando in their journey towards homeownership. For several months, we mapped the necessary steps leading to the goal of owning a home and revised those steps as life inevitably happened and circumstances changed. I believe they viewed every setback as an opportunity to demonstrate to me their perseverance. Our “Near North Waco” neighborhood is fortunate to now claim among our own such a strong and determined family.

Actually, Rosa and Fernando’s move into the neighborhood is more of a homecoming than a new arrival; Fernando even lived in a house across the street when he was a newborn. Rosa concluded her speech at the housewarming by listing all of their extended family who also live in the neighborhood and have purchased Waco CD homes. She explained, “Now we can share more life together. Thanks to God, they also achieved their dream of buying houses through this same program and now we are here as a family. We can all reach our dreams with the help of God and with effort and never losing faith in front of whatever circumstance.”



By: Gabriela Gatlin

## Congressman Flores Visit



Congressman Flores (right side) and his staff came to visit Waco Community Development to learn about the work we have been doing alongside our community. He learned about what we do from our staff and met one of the families that we served in the past. He also received a driving tour of the Near Northside neighborhood.

After visiting a Sunday service at Greater New Light Missionary Baptist Church, I knew the Lord was calling me to plug into that ministry and the North Waco community for my last semester of seminary. An hour before I graduated, I got the call. It was the call that would transform my life for the next year and a half. I was welcomed as the Community Organizer of North Waco. This began the next part of my journey as the Lord continued working in me and through me in North Waco.

As the Community Organizer for North Waco, I had the honor of witnessing life change happen and hope restored. I had a front row seat to moments of empowerment and leaders arise. I celebrated with people who achieved the goals they set for themselves. My excitement grew as I watched community members take ownership of their neighborhood and fight for what they deserve. I was humbled at my own personal growth and the saints He placed around me to challenge me for more growth. I was blessed to have served alongside some of the most dedicated and selfless people this side of heaven.

Thank you. Thank you for being community and home to me and for allowing me to be a part of the family. It is funny when the Lord calls you somewhere, there's this tug on your pride-filled heart to be obedient to that call. The tug took place when I decided to continue to serve in Waco after college and it's back now as I say goodbye to home for the last 11 years. I will be the Community Minister at First Baptist Church of Norman, Oklahoma. I am excited for what the Lord has in store for North Waco and the Greater Waco community. I find peace and rest from the Lord's promises in Isaiah 61 to "bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." I will forever remember the "oaks of righteousness" in "the 254", who daily reminded me of His splendor.



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## Man, It's Hot!

By: Darrell Abercrombie



In the summer of 2011, we had ninety-days where the temperature was over 100 degrees with forty-four days of consecutive 100 degree heat. 2011 was the driest summer in Texas history. Since 1998, 3.8 million of the State's 167.5 million acres burned in some 24,000 fires, and roughly 2,800 homes were destroyed. More than 50 people died due to heat related illnesses. The U.S. Government declared 177 counties and surrounding states as disaster areas because of no rain and heat in the surrounding areas.

Texas lost 7.62 billion dollars for ninety days of extreme heat and no rain. Can you imagine what the Israelites must have experienced to go 1,277 days without any rain? Elijah went to King Ahab and said, "For 3 ½ years there will be no rain or dew in this place." If we lost 7.62 billion in 90 days, how many billions of dollars would be lost for 1,277 days?

Sherie bought a house a couple of years ago. She fixed up her yard, planted flowers, and bought patio furniture for the back yard. Things were looking pretty good until she found large cracks in the ground by her flower bed and in the dirt on the side of her house. Even though she watered her grass and flower bed to keep her plants alive, the summer heat and drought indicated that she needed to water more to keep the conditions from causing damage to her foundation.

Those of us spending any time outdoors need to remember to apply sunscreen and stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Wear light-colored clothing and a wide-brimmed hat. Make sure the elderly are in a cool environment and that our four-footed friends have plenty of shade and cool water.

Look everyone, don't play with the heat. If you are not cautious, the heat will discipline you. Never leave a child or pet in a vehicle by themselves with or without the A/C on. From 1998 - 2011, 80 children died from hyperthermia or heat stroke in vehicles in Texas.

Get your soaker hoses out and make sure you are watering around the foundation of your house at least twice a week. This keeps cracks from forming in the ground around your foundation and keep things from shifting or moving. Hopefully you can save some money from the damage that droughts usually cause.



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## Issue 42 - 2012

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## Welcome to the Team Alexis!

By: Alexis Christensen



What an honor it is to be the newest member of the Waco Community Development staff! I moved to Waco six years ago as a freshman at Baylor University, ready to fling my green and gold afar. After receiving my degree in Political Science, I began to wonder how people actually navigated the systems and laws I had learned about in class. This curiosity led me to pursue a Master's of Social Work at Baylor. I recently graduated from that program in May 2012 and felt God leading me to pursue transformative work here in Waco.

During my time in Waco I have had the opportunity to work and intern at outstanding organizations in our city, including: the Waco Foundation, the City of Waco Housing and Community Development Department, the Texas Hunger Initiative, and the Lutheran Ministries and Social Services of Waco. All of these experiences helped shape my passions for seeing systemic change in our community.

I also love traveling with my husband Philip, reading, spending time with my family, and Pinterest. My role at Waco Community Development will allow me to continue the great work that is happening in North Waco within Brook Avenue and West Avenue Elementary schools and within the community. I will have the privilege of hearing the visions and dreams of community members for their neighborhoods and work with them to translate those dreams into reality. I am excited to be a part of seeing this neighborhood restored.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Housing:

Homeowners: 184  
New Homes: 46  
Renovated: 16

### Opportunities:

Counseled: 1,468  
Active: 103

### Maintenance:

Volunteers: 6,033  
Vol. Hours: 45,332  
Lots Mowed: 2,294