Meanwhile, after years of unsuccessfully trying to resolve their marital issues, John’s parents were divorced. When John was eight, his mother moved to Los Angeles and began dating a new man.

The attacks on John continued during that time, as it was nearly a year before John finally moved in with his mother and her new boyfriend.

“My mom rescued me from a situation where I had no control and people were abusing me.”

John was confused and conflicted, especially when it came to his grandmother. On one hand, she had been a loving mother figure to him for four years but on the flip side, she failed to protect him from the abuse happening under her own roof.

The overwhelming sense of relief John felt when moving in with his mother and her boyfriend came with a whole new set of challenges. He did not get along with the new man in her life and the two frequently battled for his mother’s attention and affections.

When John was 15, his mother and her boyfriend were married and started a family of their own. Living conditions for John had deteriorated significantly. His bedroom was now fitted with “security” bars, trapping him inside. The alternative to being home was no better.

“I would have bad instances with my step-dad, so I would have to choose which was worse: staying with my drunk and abusive step-dad or going to my grandmother’s and face the possibility of being molested again.”

The stress and depression of his living conditions led John to seek relief in any way possible. He began experimenting with marijuana and alcohol, which actually helped John to cope and break free.

Halfway through his senior year of high school, when he turned 18, John made a very difficult decision.

“I quit school and moved out on my own. I decided not to graduate because it would be easier and simpler for me to just leave and start my own life at that point.”

John was ready to move away from the chaos at home. He had a friend who was going to attend UC Berkley, so he and his friend went up to San Francisco together.

John was not attending UC Berkley but was able to get by pretending to be a student. He got away with it for three full months before he was finally caught and forced to leave the campus.

Undaunted, John pursued work and held several different jobs from working in a restaurant to...
Notes from the Hearth

Dear Friends of the Trust,

Welcome to our Summer edition of the Trust News. We have taken time to revamp our look and content, which should make our news and special stories easier to read and share with others.

The Trust moves at (near) lightning speed to plan, build and implement permanent supportive housing that addresses the significant issue of chronic homelessness in downtown Los Angeles.

The first part of 2013 was no exception: the Star Apartments are at 85% of construction completion, and with its iconic design comes a new partnership with the Los Angeles Department of Health Services and the new ‘Housing For Health’ division.

We are proud of this partnership and our shared goal: to improve the health outcomes for chronically homeless living on Skid Row through housing and easy access to first-rate medical care.

We are also pleased to announce that construction is now in full swing at the New Pershing Hotel Apartments. The New Pershing will be completed in early 2015 and will retain its beautiful historic façade, accompanied by 69 units of supportive housing and ground floor commercial space. I am also pleased to welcome three new senior members to the Trust’s Executive Team: Gigi Szabo, Deputy Executive Director, Jeanette Levin, Fund Development Director and Dana Trujillo, Housing Development Director. We look forward to many future successes through their combined experience and fresh perspectives on our mission and work.

Mike Alvidrez
Executive Director

As many of our readers know, non-profits face a constant struggle to sustain their mission and programs. My own passion for non-profit management and fundraising began while pursuing an MBA in Finance (a long time ago). I was amazed by the nimble ability of non-profits to respond to shifting social issues while also economizing each dollar spent on solutions – an elusive goal for many businesses.

In my first six months at the Trust, I have witnessed our team’s innovative brilliance at creating beautiful homes and programs for homeless and formerly homeless men and women.

Each dollar that is donated to the Trust is ‘stretched’ to ensure clean and modern homes with a wide range of on-site supportive programs designed to nurture resident recovery through peaceful communities. When you add the passion of our dedicated staff, you have a solution for ending homelessness that reflects our shared vision for a 21st century Los Angeles where every person has a home.

The magnitude of our work cannot continue without the help and generosity of donors. Every contribution makes a difference, and supports vital elements of new homes, mental health and case management services, and programs for recovery and improving physical health.

If you would like to make a gift, go to www.skidrow.org - PayPal and credit cards are accepted. If you would like to learn more about our work and homes please feel free to call me at 213.683.0522 x189 or send an email to jeanette.levin@skidrow.org.

Jeanette Levin
Fund Development Director
Cultivating Community At The Las Americas

When the first planning session for the Las Americas’ garden/courtyard redesign got underway, the room was buzzing with excitement. That was nearly two years ago.

During that time, a total of three resident-based design meetings - led by the folks at Ur-Bin Gardeners and Allen Compton of SALT Landscape Architects have occurred. The result of those meetings is what the residents refer to as their “Oasis”.

The Oasis is a lush, vibrant and green organic garden & courtyard, bristling with everything from an array of peppers to majestic 6 foot tall corn stalks.

In fact, the entire courtyard has been redesigned for both style and function. Gone is the large area of hard packed dirt that covered most of the ground, as well as the concrete slab and a couple of the ficus trees. Also missing, the 20 foot cinderblock wall, sort of. Actually the wall is still there, but now a beautifully whimsical mural adorns it – thanks to the artist ‘Risk’.

New in the courtyard garden are the bike racks (which are already getting lots of use), picnic tables and benches, a barbeque area, a composting bin, a bird feeder and bird bath (much to the delight of several dozen sparrows and finches), and a newfound sense of community and pride for the residents and staff of the Las Americas.

As the Trust approaches its 25th year (2014), many of our original buildings – such as the Crescent, Hart, and Sanborn - that served as hallmarks of our original vision are now capturing our attention and efforts, once again.

Leveraging our role as a steward of homes for the homeless, the Trust will commence a portfolio-wide upgrade to our signature buildings that includes improved security, cool air and energy-efficient options to reduce costs and improve sustainability.

To help finance these improvements, the Trust will launch a donor and public awareness program in the coming winter. this campaign will allow our supporters to ‘adopt a building’ and improve the lives or our residents.

Stay tuned – each building has a story, and our residents and staff look forward to sharing these with Trust supporters through the coming year.
TRANSFORMATIONAL PHILANTHROPY

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE STAR

The Star Apartments will open in the fall of 2013, and represents the newest building in the Trust’s portfolio and quite possibly, a model for future housing throughout Los Angeles. The building’s beautiful design by Michael Maltzan Architecture allows for 15,000 sq. feet of open space that will comprise a basketball court, library, running track, community gardens, a workout room and art therapy space. The building will house 100 chronically homeless, high utilizers of public health systems, chosen in partnership with the LA Department of Health Services.

Like many non-profits, the Trust utilizes philanthropic donations as a way of generating revenue for costly services – such as Case Managers, Transition Specialists and mental health professionals – to a very need-intensive population. However, recent cuts to public sector funding (both sequestration and overall government reductions) have resulted in a shortfall to critical programs that support the Trust’s solution for ending chronic homelessness.

To address this shortfall, the Trust has launched a philanthropic Campaign for the Star that will bring donors, private foundations and corporations together in a long-term investment into the outcomes expected for Star residents. The Star’s unique and beautiful design allows for the dedication of named spaces – a way for our community to reflect their support and involvement in transforming the lives of homeless men and women on Skid Row.

For every individual that the Trust houses, there is another who is still homeless, hungry and sick on Skid Row. The Star is the first building that our community can help sustain through direct donor involvement.

Building beautiful, affordable homes with dedicated and caring support services will serve as a beacon to raise awareness of both the issue and real solution to ending homelessness in downtown Los Angeles.

THE STAR WELLNESS CENTER AND DHS PARTNERSHIP

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE STAR

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Donate a Home at the Star

While contributions of any amount are welcome, a donation of $200 will help transform the Star Apartments and will be recognized through a beautifully designed donor tile on the Star’s lobby wall created by Piece by Piece, a nonprofit social enterprise arts organization (www.piecebypiece.org).

The Campaign for the Star will specifically support:

- Completion and furnishing of 100 studio apartments with appliances, dishes and storage space
- The Star Wellness Center, a 2nd floor open space encompassing a community garden, basketball court, walking track, exercise room and art therapy space
- Transition and case management teams who will guide residents from living on the streets to living in new homes
- Access to ground floor medical and mental health care
- Community programs focused on the mind, body and spirit

Please help us in changing lives and opportunities for the better.

If you have questions about the Campaign for the Star, or to take a ‘hard hat’ tour of the Star Apartments, please contact Jeanette Levin at (213) 683-0522 x189 (jeanette.levin@skidrow.org).

If you would like to donate, visit www.skidrow.org. PayPal, debit cards and credit cards accepted.

THE TRUST NEWS SUMMER 2013
The Gifts That Build Homes

Each year the Trust recognizes our generous supporters and each gift helps us move closer to a day when men, women and children are no longer left on the street to be ignored. Thank you to our 2012 contributors for supporting a brighter future on Skid Row.

The Individual Donors Who Made In-Kind or Cash Donations Totaling $500 or More

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- Mike Alvidrez and Diane Bumford
- Anthony and Eve Anderson
- David Armitage
- Robert and Maureen Carlson
- Chad and Christina Conwell
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United Way of Greater Los Angeles
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas
United Way, General Electric Campaign
Wells Fargo Bank

The Solid Roof That Shelters Us From Life’s Storms

The Framework That Supports Our Vision

The Unbreakable Foundation That Keeps Us Rock-Steady
Continued from Page 1.

office work. Unfortunately his increased use of marijuana and alcohol prevented him from gaining any traction.

This unsettled period in John’s life was compounded by the residual side effects from years of physical and sexual abuse. The lack of exposure to so-called ‘normal’ teenage activities left him in a repressed state. When his curiosity took him to San Francisco’s notorious Castro District – he began to explore his darker side.

It was during this period that John’s grandmother passed away. When he got the call he was understandably devastated. He was racked with guilt from not being there for his grandmother because of what his life had become.

John returned to Los Angeles determined to get some kind of career going. Once again, he maintained several different office jobs and even gave mortgage banking a try.

Everything he had been doing to build a life for himself collapsed in 2002 when his mother was diagnosed with a rare aggressive form of cervical cancer. She needed surgery and chemotherapy immediately to survive. John made the decision to stay with and care for his mother during that time.

Unfortunately, two weeks into her recovery, John’s mother passed away unexpectedly. The doctors overseeing her case were not aware that the cancer had spread to her lungs. John was by his mother’s side when she passed away, leaving him devastated, confused and angry.

“When my mom died, half of me died with her. I was a completely different person. After that I was emotionless. I was just dead. I had no anger, no sadness. I wanted to die with her.”

Severe depression and further isolation left John feeling absolutely hopeless. Suicidal thoughts began creeping into his mind.

“I had heard that drugs kill - and that’s what I wanted. So I started using - again.”

John was at the beginning of a two-year emotional breakdown. His apathy led him back to alcohol and he started using hard drugs for the first time. The drug use started socially but eventually became something he only did alone, allowing the depression and anxiety to flourish.

“It wasn’t to have fun. It wasn’t a bridge to a sexual attachment or a bridge to feel love or a connection with someone. It was more that I was depressed and wanted to be by myself.”

In 2004, John’s conscience finally got the best of him. He realized he was on a path of self destruction. He was capable of so much more and was ready to build a life he could be proud of.

“Within two weeks I was in rehab and seeing a doctor. I just immersed myself in getting better. I needed to get okay with me.”

John has been drug-free ever since. He continued his forward momentum after rehab, by getting a job in an ophthalmology office. He worked there for three years before the poor economy caused the office to close.

“I couldn’t find any work. I was getting worse - worse with my depression, worse with my anxiety until eventually it was hard to live. I had no money coming in. I was basically homeless. I was literally on my last couches. I had no general relief and I ended up on Skid Row for a few months.”

When John had finally run out of options, his luck changed for the better. Robert Navarro, a Resident Services Coordinator for the Trust, saw John on the street and recognized him.

“Robert ended up being someone that I knew from my old high school.”

Robert steered John to the Skid Row Housing Trust and assisted him with getting his application started for an apartment. “I did everything they asked of me – probably three or four times. Because of my health and disabilities, I was able to get an apartment quicker. I also had my application for disability approved – which helped.”

In November of 2011, John moved into the New Carver Apartments. Two months later he was asked to participate in the Resident Ambassador Program. Even though his struggles with mental health were just beginning to be addressed, he realized that joining the program would help break the cycle of isolation that continued to plague him.

Since joining the program, John has truly embraced the role of Ambassador and community advocate. He has taken it further by becoming a Peer Advocate with the Hilton Foundation’s Prioritization Project. John is now proudly assisting new and soon-to-be residents with the transition from the streets to having a home of their own.

“I help people get into their homes. I help with resources. I help them with food, clothing, HIV issues. I think this is a great starting point for me. I found what I like to do, which is helping people.

I think the best thing for me right now is when someone asks me for help. I’m able to ask them their name and get a response with a smile. For me, getting a smile from someone gives me a smile.”

When John was asked about what it was like to live in the iconic Michael Maltzan designed New Carver Apartments building, he replied, “Wow! This is my home. This is definitely MY home.”

If your school, church or other community group would like to schedule a Resident Ambassador for a presentation on solving homelessness, contact Daniel Rizik-Baer, Community Relations Manager at 213.683.0522 x137 or send an email to daniel@skidrow.org.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH PEER ADVOCACY

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, our Prioritization Project partner, is also responsible for the Peer Advocate Program. Currently there are two part-time Peer Advocates who work with both new and soon-to-be residents and came to us through the Prioritization Project. Anthony Haynes from the Abbey Apartments and John Bañuelos from the New Carver Apartments are the current Peer Advocate.

Anthony says, “Once they put in an application, I walk them through the whole process. Then once they move in, I let them know what it is going to be like. I recommend the groups, the services, the doctors and help them to see their case manager. It is such an inspiration to see them from day one’

The program is overseen by Connie Wong, Program Manager for the Rainbow Apartments and Richy Myers, Transitional Housing Specialist. They work with both the Peer Advocates and the residents.

Often, the new residents will need someone to accompany them to medical appointments or even the grocery store. Richy and Connie are there to assist as well as find the necessary resources for them to develop and maintain a functioning independent lifestyle.

Because of the great resident response to the program, the Trust is considering adopting a similar program to assist the residents who come to us from outside the Prioritization Project.
Our 2nd class of Resident Ambassadors graduated to a full house and a standing ovation last December. Pictured above from left to right are Executive Director Mike Alvidrez, Michael Shelton, Robert Cox, Lawrence Horn, Tony Osborne, Ambassador Program creator Molly Rysman, John Bañuelos, and Patricia Aitken.

They Are Not Just Resident Ambassadors, They Are Voices For Change

The Resident Ambassador Program was initially conceived to address the gap that existed between external stakeholders, such as the media, local community and elected officials, and our residents. The Trust receives numerous requests from groups and the media for insights on resident living, such as ‘What is it like to live in the New Carver?’

Our adept staff can only speculate about what it is like, but since they do not live in the buildings day to day, it is impossible to speak to the experience of being homeless and the transition into a permanent abode. As such, it became clear that the best way to answer our stakeholders was to help our residents find their voice.

The Ambassador Program provides monthly training to residents on storytelling and public communication. Since launching the program, we have proudly graduated 18 Ambassadors. We have watched some of the program members blossom into staunch community advocates, while others have been empowered by simply finding their own voice. And one of them, Steve Hatter, has even gone on to become the first resident member of our Board of Directors.

What the participants get out of the program is up to them. We have heard from many of them that they feel a new personal confidence along with a deeper connection to their community.

In December, the program marked another milestone as our second class of Resident Ambassadors celebrated their graduation at the 2nd Annual Storytellers event at the Last Bookstore in Downtown LA.

As we get ready to begin the process of recruiting a new class of Ambassadors, it seems fitting that we take a moment to say thank you to the first two classes of Resident Ambassador Program participants. They have helped shape government policy by sharing their stories everywhere from building tours to the halls of the state assembly. And when their neighbors need help or have a question about something, they are there to help their fellow residents too.

For everything they have done and the countless lives that they have touched (including the staff), we say THANK YOU for reminding us that our work needs to be purpose driven and executed with passion every day.

Patricia Aitken
John Bañuelos
Ginger Beatty
Karen Burton
Tina Castallaw
Marcus Christy
Linsley Clark
Robert Cox
Scot Davidson
Len Evans
Steve Hatter
Eric Havard
Brenda Hill
Lawrence Horn
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Frederick Smith
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Rick Surwillo
Dante Townsend
Theresa Winkler
Skid Row Housing Trust solves homelessness by providing permanent supportive housing. The Trust provides homes for people who have experienced homelessness, prolonged extreme poverty, poor health, disabilities, mental illness and/or addiction. The Trust provides critical support services for our residents to lead safe, stable lives in wellness. The Trust ensures success by reducing homelessness through opportunities for our residents and better neighborhoods for our communities.

Skid Row Housing Trust’s philosophy is simple: homes + support = success

Skid Row Housing Trust is a 501c(3) organization to which contributions are tax-deductible.

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