

A Life Changing Experience

An Interview with David Williams,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Make-A-Wish Foundation of America, Phoenix

A Volunteer-Driven Organization

An Interview with Chris Clarke, Senior Vice President,
Communications, Habitat for Humanity International, Atlanta



David Williams addresses a group of Make-A-Wish Foundation donors.

EDITORS' NOTE David Williams spent a 10-year career at Habitat for Humanity International, rising to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer before joining the Make-A-Wish Foundation of America in January 2005. The following year, he was appointed to the Helping to Enhance the Livelihood of People (HELP) Around the Globe Commission by President Bush.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Founded in 1980, the Make-A-Wish Foundation is the nation's largest wish-granting organization. Today, the foundation grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions in the U.S. every 41 minutes.

What is the history of the Make-A-Wish Foundation?

The foundation started because a young boy named Chris Greicius, who was diagnosed with leukemia, always wanted to be a police officer. So some concerned friends arranged for him to be an honorary Arizona state trooper for the day. He had the opportunity to ride in a motorcycle and a helicopter, and get a uniform. Now, 27 years later, we have granted nearly 150,000 wishes.

How important is the Foundation's relationship with the NBA?

Since 2000, the NBA, along with its players and teams, have granted more than 250 wishes, including trips to the NBA All-Star Game and the NBA Finals. From an individual player standpoint, we have two who are members of our National Advisory Council – Grant Hill of the Orlando Magic and Chris Webber of the Detroit Pistons. Last year, the NBA's MVP, Dirk Nowitzki, gave us \$25,000 from his foundation, and just last month, I sent a thank-you letter to Kobe Bryant because he just granted his 100th wish, which is just remarkable.

Does the Foundation grant wishes outside of the United States?

Yes. We license an organization called the Make-A-Wish Foundation International, which is in over 30 countries. They are also based in Phoenix, so we work collaboratively with them. If a kid in America wants to attend the World Cup in Germany, we'll collaborate with the International organization to grant that wish.

Fulfilling these wishes must have an impact on the child's entire family.

When a child develops a serious illness, it dramatically impacts the entire family – brothers and sisters, moms and dads. The problems the family had prior to that illness pale in comparison. That family's life is turned upside down as they begin dealing with doctors, hospitals, radiation, chemotherapy, and surgeries, not to mention the exorbitant cost of health care. In the midst of that chaos, we come along and say, "If you could wish to do anything, or go anywhere, or have anything, what would that be?" We help a child be a kid again – to dream, and to think beyond his illness. And that's a life-changing experience. ●



Chris Clarke

EDITORS' NOTE Christopher Clarke worked at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi for more than 20 years before being appointed to his current position.

COMPANY BRIEF Based in Americus and Atlanta, Georgia, Habitat for Humanity International (www.habitat.org) is an ecumenical Christian ministry dedicated to the cause of eliminating poverty housing. Since 1976, Habitat has built more than 225,000 houses and works in nearly 90 countries, providing shelter for more than one million people.

What is Habitat for Humanity's core mission?

At a fundamental level, our mission is to eliminate poverty housing around the world and help families in need to live more successful lives in affordable, simple, decent homes of their own.

What is the nature of your partnership with NBA Cares?

Our partnership with NBA Cares has been focused largely, but not solely, on our work in the aftermath of the tragic hurricanes that struck our Gulf Coast in 2005. We have been very fortunate to work with such a generous organization, which brings ongoing attention to the long-term recovery efforts that are taking place from Mobile, Alabama, all the way over to Beaumont, Texas. Partnerships like the one we have with NBA Cares brings highly visible players and supporters of the NBA to confront problems, and enables us to show the world that work is ongoing. And what we have seen, all across the United States for the past 24 months, is that the attention that we've received from our efforts in the gulf have had a ripple effect throughout the country, with nearly every Habitat affiliate from Spokane, Washington, to Miami, Florida, all reporting more phone calls and more donations.

We are living in such a frenetic time, yet Habitat seems to garner such tremendous support. Has that always been true?

One of our big challenges in the gulf, and everywhere, in addition to funding, is that we're a volunteer-driven organization. So we have an ongoing need for people to take time from their jobs, vacations, retirements, and educations, to spend a few days – or weeks in some cases – with us, helping provide the volunteer labor that we need. What has been so helpful about working with NBA Cares is that, on top of the generous financial support and healthy sponsorship, we've gained this huge, intangible benefit from the volunteers it generates. This occurs because of our work with the NBA at the All-Star Game, as well as at the various playoff games. They attract such an intense media spotlight that enables us to tell new audiences, new volunteers, and new potential donors, that we need their help.

Do you partner with other organizations as well?

Our partners include churches, sports franchises, corporations, and good-hearted citizens. And without people partnering with us we couldn't drive the first nail. We also work in partnership with our homeowner families who have to put in a down payment and between 300 and 500 hours of labor on their house during the construction process. But none of that can start until we can find appropriate partners to provide the land, the resources, the financial or in-kind products, and then the volunteers to make the dream of home ownership a reality. ●