



Las Vegas REALTORS® Use Game Changer Grant to Help Homeowners in Need – January 2013

When the dues for membership in the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® went up last year, it was keenly felt by those real estate professionals already experiencing the severe downturn in the Las Vegas housing market. Kolleen Kelley, then president of the 11,000-member Greater Las Vegas Association of REALTORS® (GLVAR,) jumped at the chance to bring some of those funds back to the community where it was so badly needed.

GLVAR applied for and received a Game Changer grant of \$25,000 from NAR to partner with Rebuilding Together Southern Nevada, the local chapter of a well-established national organization that provides home maintenance, repairs and upkeep to low-income, elderly, disabled and veteran homeowners in need.

According to Joe Brezny, GLVAR's Deputy Government Affairs Director who put together the application for the Game Changer grant, the key was in wanting to accomplish a goal, rather than taking credit for a process. "We REALTORS® market and sell houses better than anyone else in the world. But we do not run a charity. So, for efficiency's sake, it became a matter of finding someone who already did." It was a real testament to Kolleen Kelley and the GLVAR leadership, he says, that they didn't need for their name to be all over a brand new project.

"It worked out so well," Kelley recalls. "There is such great need in the community, and our association looks to do anything we can to help the underprivileged, especially where housing is concerned. There was no need to reinvent the wheel, because we were already involved with charities like Rebuilding Together –these are our charities of choice. Our members volunteer with organizations like Habitat for Humanity, where we have been corporate sponsors of a house every year, in honor of our outgoing presidents. We especially like Rebuilding Together," she explains, "because of its strong volunteer component. It feels better when you get your hands dirty, whether or not you're also writing a check."

As for those checks, Rebuilding Together has a long history of careful stewardship of its funding dollars – something GLVAR researched carefully, before making such a substantial gift. According to Cynthia Baca, the organization's Executive Director, 30 percent of its operating budget comes from corporate donations like the one from GLVAR, often accompanied by in-kind resources or volunteer manpower. Rebuilding Together commits a maximum of \$5,000 to each house it works on, including materials, equipment, and paid contractors, when necessary. The rest is accomplished by dedicated volunteers, using largely donated materials.

"The REALTORS® designated their generous gift to help veterans, of whom there are a great many in this area," notes Baca, "When I tell you that 80 percent of our clients live in mobile homes, and many veterans need wheelchair ramps to keep from being housebound, and that each ramp costs about as much as a good air conditioning unit – which are also in high demand in this climate – you start to understand how quickly the



money can go. We've dedicated a big portion of the GLVAR grant to major critical repairs, and leverage the dollars as best we can," says Baca. "The REALTORS® have always been great friends of Rebuilding Together, and this partnership is a tremendous help."

By partnering with Rebuilding Together, an organization that attracts others committed to strong and healthy housing in the Greater Las Vegas area, the REALTORS® hope to arrest the precipitous rate of foreclosure and at-risk homeownership in local neighborhoods. In helping to stabilize and increase property values throughout the city, they are improving everyone's bottom line, one home at a time.

To learn more about how the Greater Las Vegas Association of REALTORS® is helping homeowners in need, contact Joe Brezny, Deputy Government Affairs Director, at 702.784.5000 or JBrezny@glvar.org

Rebuilding Together volunteers work on a variety of rehab projects.





Rebuilding Together volunteers celebrate a day's hard work of helping homeowners in need.