

# Community

## New Habitat executive director has lofty goals

By Ian Holroyd

METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

John Gerrard is laying a solid foundation to raise Habitat for Humanity Halton to new heights.

In about six months as the organization's executive director — taking the post in June 2012 — the 41-year-old father of two sees significant growth on the horizon for Habitat Halton.

"It's a big year," said Gerrard, who up until recently had spent his entire career in the private sector. "We are on a tipping point."

In the next five years, Gerrard said, the not-for-profit intends to build 50 new homes across Halton.

This is despite the fact that in the 12 years Habitat for Humanity Halton has been in existence it has only built 17 new homes in the region.

However, Gerrard told the *Champion's sister paper, the Burlington Post*, during an interview at the organization's Burlington office that he's optimistic.

"It's possible and I'm excited to say that it's going to happen," he said. "The plans are already in play. The land's been purchased, the buildings are in design, families are being recruited."

"Can we make 50 homes in five years? Absolutely, because at the end of the day we know there's a huge demand out there. We know the community's going to support us. They've been very supportive to this date."



John Gerrard is excited about the challenges of being Habitat for Humanity Halton's new executive director, a position he assumed last summer.

Gerrard said Habitat Halton is striving to build five homes in 2013, ramping up to build 24 homes in 2014.

In 2012, it built one house, which was in Milton.

Gerrard said he isn't sure why there weren't more houses built, but said he knows there needs to be improvement.

"There may have been a lot of great plans, there may have been a lot of great things on the books but in the end it just didn't happen," he said.

Gerrard, who describes himself as an "outside the box" thinker, said if Habitat Halton

stays the course it might not reach its objectives, admitting a change in philosophy is required.

"Habitat Halton has to think outside the traditional ways of which we have done our organization's business to date," he said. "We have to think differently, we have to act differently, we have to engage different parties because that's the way we are going to hit our objective."

Gerrard said the organization also has plans to expand the ReStore — Habitat's home renovation retail outlet, initiate a youth strategy and arrange a volunteer celebration in

the new year.

With all the work in Gerrard's future, he still wanted to take the time to dispel a number of myths associated with Habitat for Humanity.

"We don't give homes away. That is the number one myth across the country," he said. "In fact, we provide no-interest mortgages, up to 30-year mortgages, to low-income families, hardworking families and those families that may not be able to ever afford a safe and decent place to live."

Gerrard said those families are required to contribute 500 hours of volunteer hours or what he called "sweat equity".

"It's an important part to have them involved in the process so they truly understand the whole structure of how it works," he said. "They actually get to participate in the home builds, for most of them, which gives them a real vested interest in the success of their home."

"We're dealing with people who may not make enough to own that first home but are willing to commit to the process of working with us," he said.

Gerrard said anyone who fits a certain income bracket can apply for a home through Habitat. He said the maximum annual family income for a three-bedroom home is usually about \$50,000.

He also said the definition of family has changed and basically describes a group of people who live together. Singles are also welcome to apply. There are currently 17 families in the Habitat for Humanity Halton system and Gerrard explained every dollar generated by those mortgages gets cycled back into building more homes.

Gerrard said Habitat Halton is currently sitting on \$1 million worth of land across the region. He said Habitat Halton is planning to build homes in Burlington, Oakville and Acton next year and in 2014 is focusing on Burlington, Georgetown and Acton. He said it's actively working to acquire more land, using channels the organization has never taken advantage of in the past.

For more information, visit [www.habitathalton.ca](http://www.habitathalton.ca).

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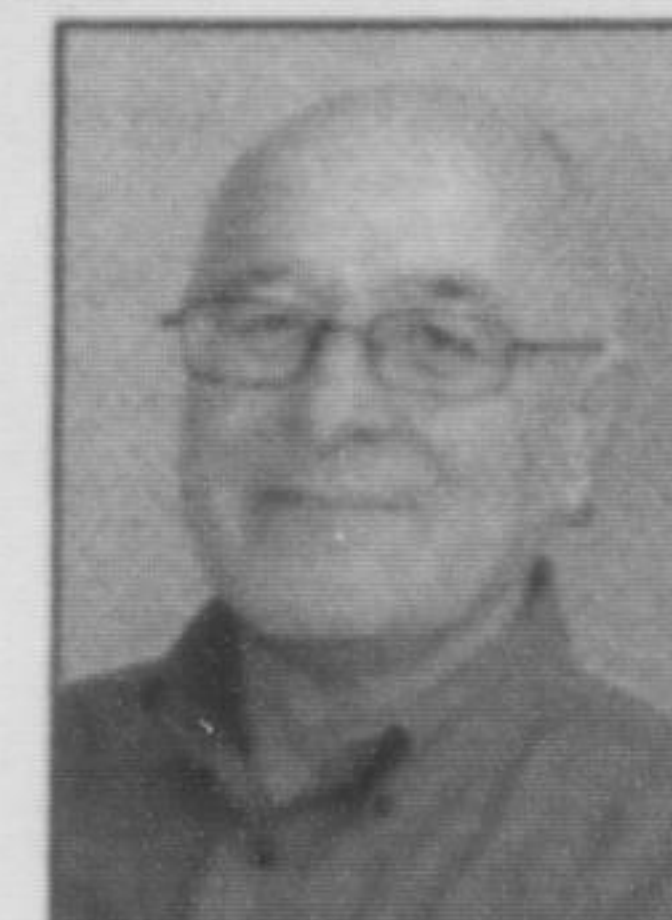
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