

25th Anniversary Speech
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September 12, 2002

Sooner or later everyone wants the same thing for their birthday, not to be reminded of it! My entire time today could be spent thanking and honoring so many people who made this event, our 25th Birthday, possible. I would like to briefly attempt that and will conclude with a few thoughts looking forward to the PHA's next 25 years.

Let me begin by thanking our speakers. First Andy Boss, who has been the PHA's Board Chair for the last 12 years and on our Board since 1986. Obviously a true leader for much of the PHA's history! I am sure everyone in this room is aware of Andy's impressive record of service to our community. I've heard Andy say publicly, at ceremonies where he is being honored, that he counts his years with the PHA among his most cherished. Thanks, Andy, for your steady hand at the PHA's helm and for your quiet and eloquent voice of friendship and support all these years!

Thank you Mayor Kelly. First for fitting this event into your busy schedule, for your decades of public service to Saint Paul and your accomplishments to date in your new job as Mayor, and, of special importance to the people gathered here today, for your commitment to adding 5,000 housing units in Saint Paul over the next four years including 1,000 units of affordable housing. As you know Mayor, the PHA is proud to assist your office and our city preserving, improving, and expanding the supply of affordable housing.

Thank you Judge Hudson. First for your important and lasting contributions as a PHA Commissioner (including being our replacement housing watchdog anytime there was the threat of losing even one unit of family housing), for your wisdom and advocacy on behalf of client rights, and for your overall good nature and civility. This community is indeed fortunate to now have you serving in a formal judicial capacity.

Thank you to my good friend and colleague David Morton. At the minimum David deserves our gratitude for traveling the greatest distance to be here today. And yes, it is true that I am serving in another national leadership position because of David's invitation or insistence (he is a persuasive person)! My hats off to you David for carving time away from your own substantial duties as Executive Director of the Reno Housing Authority to serve as President of the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association. You are making an important contribution with Congress to preserve and hopefully expand our programs.

Thanks so much to our inspirational resident leaders! To Shirley, who is my boss, my neighbor and my friend, thanks for your boundless enthusiasm and support on the PHA's Board. And special thanks Roberta and Maria for reminding us all about the true value of a stable and affordable home.

And, before he is even allowed to say one word, my sincere thanks and respect for all that George Latimer means to this city, to this agency, and to me personally. You know, the last time George really was the Mayor was about 24 years ago. But he is such a presence and a force to this day that all of us, come-on, you know it's true, all of us still drop everything whenever George calls. (My apologies or true confession Mayor Kelly). Well George, the whole world is your staff and is at your service precisely because of who you are and what you stand for. You mentor us, you inspire us, and we strive to be better public servants because of that.

This will be too brief, but thank you to all the other distinguished guests with us today. Current PHA Board Members, elected officials, our many-valued community partners, our friends, and our families (mine is here as well today). You support and guide this Agency's work in countless ways. We could not accomplish what we do without you. ASI's "Compassion in Action," is a theme appropriate for all of your work to the community.

Special thanks to the Anniversary Committee led by Tristy Auger. Their names are printed on the program. I also ask you to help me honor the PHA staff listed on the back of the program that have worked here for the past 25 years or more. The group ranges from Academic All Stars to former bad boys who fortunately found the PHA right after high school reform school and probably one step ahead of Reform School! Does anyone remember the term "hoods"?

Thank you to all the staff and all the residents especially our 16 Hi-Rise groups for putting together the display boards you see throughout that help us all remember "when".

Thank you Marshall Anderson, the city council and the Mayor (whoever he was) in 1976/1977 for taking on this huge organizational task of creating an independent Public Housing Agency. I know they all had more on their plate at that time as well, but we benefit today because of those decisions. And I think they were correct to create an organization and a governing Board who could focus 100% of their time to the difficult unglamorous issues of low-income property management.

And finally my deepest appreciation is reserved for our family of current and former PHA employees and our Attorney. This is, and has been, without a doubt, the finest group of professionals with whom I have worked in my 27 years in the public realm. Will all current and former staff please stand and be recognized?

A Chinese proverb says, "By the work, one knows the worker." Folks, the hard won and excellent reputation of the PHA is known because of these remarkable "workers."

Providing safe, affordable, quality housing, and links to community services for over 20,000 people in public housing and Section 8 is not easy under any circumstances! Factor in the challenges all society faces around issues of education, economic status, health, disability status, aging in place, growing up (all over the place), racial and other intolerances, NIMBY syndrome, safety and security, crime, refugee resettlement,

domestic violence, family unification, and more. Well, at times it seems that just keeping the lights on is a major accomplishment. But it is the staff, this group of beautifully diverse, wonderfully dedicated, and hard-working individuals, who make it happen, 24-7. And, we do know we make a difference in people lives because we get just the right amount of feedback and support from the residents probably just when we need it too. The residents tell us with their words or sometimes, just with their eyes, how much it means to have a safe and affordable place to call home. Thank you staff!

Folks, Congress is still in session. Each year they appropriate all the funding to keep this and 3,200 other PHA's still alive. And it is a sad but true fact that some in Washington know only of failed public housing and failed PHA's. Yes, perhaps 50 to 70 PHA's have failed across the country and some of these failures have been very visible and damaging. But, public housing works in the vast majority of American cities because it is part of the neighborhood fabric in Saint Paul, Minneapolis, Reno, Duluth, Benson and many more communities.

The successes are also due in part to the notion that "you achieve according to what you believe." And 25 years later at the St. Paul Public Housing Agency, we believe that low-income people are the same as anybody else they just have lower incomes. We believe that affordable housing is a right not a privilege. And we believe that this nation (regardless of what other necessary and important work remains after September 11th) that this nation is rich enough to permanently fund these safety net housing programs.

Together the public housing and Section 8 housing programs represent approximately 2.6% of the nations housing supply. I've got the numbers . . . 2000 Census indicates 115,904,641 housing units. Of those units 1,300,000 are public housing and 1,700,000 are Section 8 and it cost taxpayers less than one half a cent each year to do this.

I am confident, looking ahead, that we can continue to work locally and nationally to fully fund this limited but precious housing resource. It's just a matter of compassion and political will. This agency and the community have come a long way since 1977. Then, our combined annual budget was approximately \$8 million per year. Today our annual budget is over \$61 million per year. We have managed our growth carefully. A few measures show: then we had 215 staff and today we have approximately 246 staff, then we had 4,250 public housing units and today we have 4,273 units, then we had 1,341 Section 8 units and today we have 3,924 units and will likely surpass our public housing supply in the not too distant future.

We will continue to manage the basics as well as our number one job. This is our quality assurance pledge to the residents and the public: Prudent fiscal management of public housing and Section 8, applicant screening, lease enforcement, sound routine maintenance and preventative maintenance, and wise capital improvements all leading to successful tenancies. McDonough homes will soon receive an 8-year \$30 million renovation, its first extensive renovation since it was built in 1955. Our staff will be increasingly diverse building on the solid foundation we have in place today where over 30% of our staff are people of color and half are women. And, in March of 2004, we will

proudly open the doors to our new Central Office building and invite you all back for another open house! Thank you, thank you, and thank you.