

Delegate Ken Plum's *Virginia E-News*



December 12, 2007

COMMENTARY

Housing for the Holidays Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

Jane and I returned recently from our third trip to Biloxi, Mississippi, where we spent a week helping to rebuild homes in a part of the city nearly destroyed by a thirty-foot storm surge propelled by Hurricane Katrina. We can see some progress being made in restoring housing over the two years of our visits for what appears sometimes as an overwhelming task. While a great deal of publicity has been given to the destruction in New Orleans, the eye of Hurricane Katrina landed at the Mississippi-Louisiana line destroying nearly 69,000 homes and severely damaging more than 65,000 homes in Mississippi. Fewer than one in 10 of the single family homes destroyed have permits to be rebuilt. The state is the poorest in the country with more than a fifth of its population living below the poverty line. Personal resources are almost nonexistent to repair the damage, and government assistance has been slow in coming. Volunteers from throughout the country are major contributors to taking up some of the slack.

For the first couple of days on this trip we were material handlers for the construction of a new home for William, a frail 68-year old gentleman with one leg, and his wife. Their home was totally washed away, and they lost all their material possessions. For the second half of the week we put the finishing touches on a home that had been restored from the effects of having been under fourteen feet of water. The home has been made totally handicapped accessible as the wife of Sam, its owner, had a massive stroke soon after the hurricane leaving her totally dependent upon the care of others.

In both instances the homeowners have been living for more that two years in 22-foot long FEMA provided trailers parked on the lawns and in the driveways of their flooded homes just as thousands of others are doing throughout the city. Persons who were in rental units that were destroyed by the hurricane are living in similar trailers in FEMA villages throughout the region. There is a reported 10,000 persons living in such trailers. Meeting the people of Biloxi who have endured these hardships and cling to their faith and hope is inspirational and worth the trip. Equally as inspiring are the volunteers from throughout the country who are

spending weeks and months sleeping in bunk beds in local churches and working long days without compensation to restore homes for the local residents. You could not meet a nicer bunch of people.

A recent *New York Times* story (November 16, 2007) reported that of the \$1.7 billion in federal money spent in Mississippi for storm recovery only \$167 million, or about 10 percent, has been spent on programs dedicated to helping the poor. About 37 percent of residents of the state's coast are low income according to federal figures. A *Washington Post* article on November 25, 2007, drew a sharp distinction between the success that is being realized in rebuilding the gambling casinos along the beaches and the slowness of rebuilding the neighborhoods.

Jane and I will return to Biloxi in the future to do our very small part in the recovery effort. In the meantime we are thankful that Sam and his wife are getting back into their restored home before the holidays, and we pray that William and his wife will have a new home by next summer. There are many others who need our contributions, help and prayers. There is nothing like having a home for the holidays!

Constituent Survey – 2008 General Assembly Session

Please take a moment to complete my annual Constituent Survey. Your responses to questions about current issues will help me as I prepare for the 2008 General Assembly Session. Take the survey by clicking on the following link. Thank you in advance for sharing your views.

[Click here for Survey](#)

Pre-Session Town Meeting in January



Join Senator Janet Howell and me for our annual Public Meeting prior to the upcoming General Assembly session on **Thursday, January 3, 2008, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the Community Room of the Reston Community Center at Hunters Woods.** Let us hear from you about issues affecting our neighborhoods and our region.

I have also scheduled a Public Meeting with Senator Mark Herring on Monday, January 7, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. at Fox Mill Elementary School, 2601 Viking Drive, Herndon. Senator Herring and I look forward to seeing you and having your views.

Please plan to attend one of these important Public Meetings. I look forward to talking with you and finding out what is important to you.

Delegate Ken Plum's Weekly "Virginia Report" on Reston Comcast Channel 28

View Delegate Plum's *Virginia Report* online at <http://www.rctv28.com/videosVR.htm>.

Announcements

The **Reston Business Crime E-mail Alert System** allows the Reston District Station Crime Prevention Office to send out **timely crime alerts and updates that may affect the local community**. These alerts can and will include any pictures, videos and descriptions that are pertinent to the crime that has been committed. Receive the Reston Business Crime E-mail Alerts by making your request to katy.fernbacher@fairfaxcounty.gov. If you have any questions for the Reston Crime Prevention Office, call PFC Katy Fernbacher at the Crime Prevention Office at 703.478.0799.

Find It Virginia is an **online collection of magazine and newspaper articles, encyclopedias, TV and radio transcripts, business and investment information, health and wellness information, and homework help** – bringing a wealth of valuable materials to library patrons **24 hours a day** at home, at school, at work, or anywhere they can connect to the Internet at www.finditva.com.

A diagnosis of cancer brings many new challenges besides medical treatment. LINC – Legal Information Network for Cancer – **links people with resources that ease the day-to-day challenges** of cancer. LINC's volunteer counselors can help ease the burdens so you can focus on your health. Call 804.644.LINC or 877.644.LINC. Visit www.cancerlinc.org.

The **"Cribs for Kids" Project** provides **safe cribs for babies to help prevent needless, tragic infant deaths**. A new portable crib costs only \$50, and bedding and shipping cost another \$20. Your donation can help **save a baby's life** by providing the child with **a safe place to sleep**. To make a donation to the Cribs for Kids Project, visit www.sidsma.org and click on "donate."

Governor Kaine has announced the **Virginia expansion of DonorsChoose.org, the award-winning nonprofit website that connects individuals with teachers who need resources for their classrooms**. Founded in 2000 by a high school teacher, DonorsChoose.org has been recognized as **"America's most innovative charity"** by the Stanford Business School and Amazon.com. Over 31,400 public school teachers nationwide have used the site to secure funding for \$14.9 million in books, art supplies, technology and other resources that their students need and use for enhanced learning projects. Teachers log on to DonorsChoose.org and submit requests for materials or experiences students need to learn. Individuals search and partially or fully fund these requests by their interests, and then receive photos and thank-you notes from the classroom they supported. DonorsChoose.org is now open to every public school in Virginia.

Frying Pan Meetinghouse, located in Fairfax County, **is one of the oldest racially-integrated Baptist churches in Virginia, having been established in 1775**. For more information on the Meetinghouse and other topics of history, art, and culture, subscribe to the **Virginia Foundation for the Humanities Newsletter** at www.vafh.org.

Calendar of Events

Attend a **free workshop on planning and paying for college** on Saturday, December 15, 10:00 a.m. at Fairfax High School Auditorium, 3501 Rebel Run, Fairfax. Learn about admissions, grants, scholarships, the financial aid process, free resources, and more. **There will also be a \$1000 Scholarship Drawing** for those attending. This event is **presented by The SallieMae**

Fund.

The **Historical Society of Fairfax County will meet on Sunday, December 16 at 2:00 p.m. at the Vale Schoolhouse**, 3124 Fox Mill Road, Oakton. Trish Strat will talk about the history of the Vale community and the origins of their historic schoolhouse. The Vale Schoolhouse, now used as a community center, is typical of the **one-room schoolhouses** that dotted the county prior to the school consolidation movement in the 1930s. **In 1937, neighborhood women purchased the surplus schoolhouse and developed the property as a community center.** Women in the Vale community have used and maintained their schoolhouse for over 70 years.

The **Fairfax Symphony Orchestra Holiday Pops** concert will be held on **Sunday, December 16, 3:00 p.m.** at George Mason University's Center for the Arts. For tickets go to www.fairfaxsymphony.org or call 888-945-2468.

Authorized and Paid for by Kenneth R. Plum

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