



Dallas Area
Habitat
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build louder

Habitat Acquires West Side Gator Boyz Drug Houses

Habitat Brings New Life to Former Drug Haven



On Friday February 28th, Dallas Habitat at last acquired four West Dallas properties linked to the notorious drug trafficking and criminal street gang, the West Side Gator Boyz. A somewhat odd alliance of rival gangs the Bloods and the Crips – and known for walking a small alligator on a leash around the neighborhood – the Gator Boyz were said to be operating as many as 20 drug houses in the small West Dallas community of Los Altos.

OPERATION GOODWILL

The Gator Boyz properties on Life Avenue were deeded to Habitat through Operation Goodwill, the U.S. Department of Justice U.S. Attorney's Office/U.S. Marshals Service civil asset forfeiture program. Although Operation Goodwill provides for the no-cost transfer of assets seized in criminal proceedings, Habitat still paid over \$70,000 to settle various liens on the property. In addition to title and closing costs, Habitat paid: delinquent property tax (over \$15,000), mowing liens (over \$1,000), accrued child support liens (over \$46,000) and two years of U.S. Marshall's office maintenance charges (over \$6,000). The program also requires Habitat to build and sell homes at each of the addresses within one year of acquisition.

The long path to acquiring the Life property began in September 2008 when Habitat helped sponsor the Revitalizing Nuisance Properties Summit. One presentation by John de la Garza, Asst. U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Texas and Catherine De Pew, Asst. U.S. Attorney, Tulsa, OK included a case study of an Operation Goodwill property transfer to Habitat for Humanity in Tulsa. Habitat staff had seen a brief mention in the Dallas Observer Unfair Park blog in August 2010, [Dallas Gang Leader, Drug Dealer and Apparent Exotic Animal Lover Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy](#) and knew that the Gator Boyz had property in West Dallas. Habitat staff contacted the two U.S. Attorneys mentioned in the story, Brandon McCarthy and Cara Pierce, inquiring whether the Gator Boyz property qualified for Operation Goodwill. Glancing through a list of seized Gator Boyz assets, Habitat assured the U.S. Attorneys that although the list included luxury automobiles, exotic animals, several homes, a ranch, weapons, cash, horses, and jewelry, Habitat was interested only in the derelict drug houses on Life that had long burdened the Los Altos community.



Disappointingly, despite Habitat's research and pursuit of the property, the City initially tapped another nonprofit to receive the Life addresses in March 2011. When that recipient balked at the lien burden, the City then offered the properties to Habitat. In June 2011, we got our first look at the interiors of two homes. One was immediately determined to be a teardown; and the second we had hopes of repairing and reselling.

However, a long year of vacancy with vandals, vagrants and squatters looks to have doomed the second home. Interestingly, this home has a double, double car garage door. Automobiles can enter from the driveway on Life and exit directly to the alley behind, providing for quick and unobserved departures.

In November 2011 we submitted the required proposal to the Department of Justice. With thanks to Republic Title for working through clouded title issues, the US Attorneys, US Marshalls, and our local City Attorney, the property is finally Habitat's.

Our work is not done. We still have at least one, likely two, demolitions. We need to deal with fence and driveway encroachments. And we need to secure the funding to build and sell new homes. Still, we are grateful for the Operation Goodwill program and the opportunity to return the property to productive use: owner-occupied, well-maintained, affordable, and back on the tax rolls. From a haven for a drug gang to homes for families, Operation Goodwill will truly be bringing new life to Life Avenue.

Join us at an event to celebrate the transfer of the Gator Boyz properties on Tuesday, March 26th at 10:30 a.m. in the 2200 block of Life Avenue.



For Dallas Morning
Newscoverage of the Gator
Boyz [click here.](#)



Sincerely,

Bill Kave

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