



Inquiries: Pamela Wallin, Box 581, Wadena, Saskatchewan, S0A 4J0 | [Pamela.wallin@gmail.com](mailto:Pamela.wallin@gmail.com) | 306-338-9045

---

## **Keynote address to Habitat for Humanity AGM and National Conference**

**Regina – May 12, 2012. 9:30 am-10:30 am (arrive 9:15)@Delta**

**Theme : “BUILDING the habitat for tomorrow”**

Thank you Mark for the gracious introduction and welcome everyone to Regina – the fastest growing economy . . .

. . . In addition to all the resources and activity –we also have very special people here in Saskatchewan... people with a work ethic – doers, people with heart . . .

\*Premier Brad Wall story.

It’s a great honour to have the opportunity to speak with you today and I’m so pleased that you’ve been able to get a small taste of Saskatchewan.

My hometown of Wadena is just about 2 hours north and a little east of here – it’s where my mom and dad and my sister and her children still live, and I am home whenever I can be – because it’s the centre of my universe because it is there I learned everything about life!

Going home always proves to be a reassuring reality check.

It’s a place where community is still about responsibilities -- not just rights.

To be close to my family and wrap myself in the warm cloak of the community where I grew up is one of the things I cherish most.

No matter where I go or live in the world, Wadena will always be my **home**.

We’re all certainly aware of the bricks-and-mortar idea of a home – and I will be returning to that later on – but if you would permit me, I’d like to spend a few moments on the more

intangible aspects of a sense of belonging --someone where we hang our hearts not just our hats -- “home” and “community.”

Wadena is a small town with a population is about 1,500 souls. It's a place where everyone knows everyone – which is both comforting in a *Leave it to Beaver* sort of way, but also a little troubling if you aren't looking for the attention and are concerned about your privacy!

Everyone knows your business!

Your parents somehow magically knew you were in trouble – often before you did – because someone would pick up the phone and call them!

If a parent wanted to find their child, it was a simple matter of calling one of the local businesses along Main Street and asking them to poke their head outside to look around and deliver the message that the child was wanted at home.

Technology has, of course, made this easier to do, but I'd be willing to bet that calling the store today, you'd still get an answer.

\*\*Peggy story –telephone operators – when they were real people

There are no homeless because everybody belongs to somebody. And even if they aren't a blood relative, they are part of the community family....someone makes sure they are fed –a *Secret Santa* Christmas basket always arrives etc.

Everybody in town good naturedly dodges and detours when some of the elderly defiantly take to the streets in their own cars, determined to keep that last little bit of independence.

And if a helping hand is needed, one is provided – not by government fiat – but out of a sense of humanity.

Family teaches you your values, communities let you practice what you've learned. A good community will prime you in so many ways for what's about come.

Beyond my immediate family, there were other forces and influences such as babysitters! Our next-door neighbour, Lily Smale, taught me the value of hard work and education.

“Grandma” Smale firmly ingrained the basics in life. There were no free rides, but if you work hard, good things will come.

My frequent visits across the street to Mrs. Fair's house got me thinking about the larger world we live in. Mrs. Fair was a British war bride from the First World War. Her accent – something

that I tried to imitate without success – was a gentle indicator that she was from other parts. We'd go through her photo albums showing all sorts of places from afar.

I remember her letting me wear her kid gloves that she got in Paris many years before. These were some of the first clues that there was a massive world just waiting to be explored.

These people from Wadena – this community – and the lessons they instilled were that equipped me to make ever-longer leaps as I got older. From Wadena to Moose Jaw.

From Moose Jaw to Regina, and beyond – to Ottawa and Toronto and New York City. And I learned a thing or two about city life!!

As someone once said ---Your true character is what you do when you think no one is looking!

No consequences for bad behaviour on a street full of strangers.... but no such chance in a small town - you must learn compromise and allow others to save face – because your kids will be on the same hockey team or marry that person's son!!

A small town isn't a panacea to the challenges of living in an increasingly urbanized world.

It has its own politics and squabbles, just like communities in big cities.

But in small towns, there's an opportunity to lend a helping hand where it's needed without having to necessarily engage a government or bureaucratic process or wait for a law to be legislated.... And you are busy doing just that!

In larger cities, we can get online and chat the night away with someone in Japan, but we hesitate to knock on our neighbour's door.

Urbanization is creating a kind of "social amnesia" where no one is anyone's keeper.

Our "gated" lifestyle has broken our faith, loyalties and trust in one another.

But when my mother makes a meal for a lonely neighbour or my father builds a wetlands bird sanctuary or my sister makes sure that the mentally challenged in her care also shovel walks or mow lawns for those less able, to me, that's community.

They are not paid. No government has legislated that conscience or behaviour. And no finance minister issues them a charitable tax receipt for their effort.

Yet these are the gestures we should reward. Individual values shared and practiced. That's a community!

I often get teased for talking about Wadena so much, but the point I'm trying to make is there's an immeasurable value to a strong community. Knowing that the people who live there are looking out for one another.....A place that welcomes newcomers, collectively keeps watch over the children, and retains a sort of "corporate knowledge" of its history, values and hopes.

Aristotle once said: Moral virtues come from habit . . . the habits we form in childhood make no small difference, rather they make all the difference.....home is more than just a physical place, it's a moral place- A PLACE WHERE YOU LEARN right from wrong and THE IMPORTANCE OF having a sense of responsibility.

In the 90s, Hillary Clinton invoked an African proverb in the title of her book "It takes a village" (to raise a child). This idea goes beyond good parenting and supportive family and friends. It delves deeper into the ideas of civic and community engagement. Getting to know and look out for your neighbour and their children. Meeting and greeting and speaking to the person waiting in line ahead of you. Putting that Blackberry or cell phone down for a few hours and take part in a real, tangible, personal conversation – be engaged, make a connection.

Allan Alda – listening is the ability to be changed by the other!

These are things that make a village. Happy, well-rounded people make a village.

I would suggest that before any of that can happen, it takes proper home for people to live in before that village can ever take shape.

Whether it's Wadena or Vancouver, having a proper home is the foundation of living a happy and productive life.

Of course, that's where Habitat for Humanity really finds its stride.

In 1985, the first Habitat home was built in Canada in Winkler, Manitoba. Today, you've added 2,000 more: More than ten million volunteer hours logged.

You're building communities that care. And boy, do we need communities that care.

Saskatchewan has been booming over the years. The world's largest producer of natural uranium, the main source of Canada's chickpeas, durum wheat, lentils and flax.

The world's largest potash producer. 3528 oilwells drilled in 2011.

5.1% unemployment – more than 2.5 points below the national average (7.7%).

5677 urban housing starts in 2011.

One of the fastest growing provinces in Canada. ....But as that growth and prosperity washes over the province, it also widens some disparities.

As more people flock to urban centres, property values increase and the cost of living goes up.

The end result for some is that they are finding themselves being shut out of realizing a simple dream: home ownership.

Just recently, I read a column in the Globe and Mail by Doug Saunders tackling this very issue. He noted common symptoms around the world driving the housing shortage. Few developers are outright building anything but the most expensive of properties. While fast-rising (or falling) home prices and the hangover from the subprime mortgage crisis in 2008 have made banks wary of lending to new home buyers.

As North America and Europe struggle with this, China faces the problem of only being able to borrow half of what a home is valued – and only if you're considered wealthy. In Africa, it's near impossible. Saunders has heard reports that the governor of the Bank of Kenya is not paid enough to qualify for a mortgage.

Canada's strong regulatory banking system meant that we could avoid the same fallout faced by our American neighbours.

However continued growth in housing prices and the elimination of 35-year mortgages has meant more people being shut out of home ownership. There are no easy solutions.

But seeing the value of Habitat for Humanity's response to the housing crisis is both appealing and innovative. The idea of providing a hand-up and not a hand-out to realize home ownership transcends any partisan rhetoric. It is the spirit of a strong community.

Charles Dickens once wrote that what is meant by knowledge of the world is simply an acquaintance with the infirmities of man. ...In other words, to be truly knowledgeable we must recognize human frailty.

When you help in a manner that maintains the dignity of everyone involved, it unleashes the greatness we all possess inside. When you understand the human condition, mountains can be moved.

It's that idea of "sweat equity" that would make Grandma Smale nod approvingly if she were with us today.

Work – for many of us – provides definition and identity, and if you are lucky or determined, it also provides a sense of purpose.

And the work you all do, through support and donations – make the work of Habitat for Humanity so meaningful.

Because it's when you give back that you truly understand purpose . . .

I've seen this spirit manifest itself in so many ways. When 23,000 Canadians gathered Roseland Ballroom to show their support after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

As Consul General of Canada in New York City in the years that followed, I witnessed this spirit as a crippled city picked itself up and carried on.

I had mentioned before how technology has made us somewhat introverted, but it has also redefined the way we look at communities.

Community was once about shared individual values and priorities.

But the definition of community is undergoing a radical rewrite as forces such as demographics and the Internet shift the ground.

Local imperatives can disappear when we live in a global world.

Globalization has meant that communities are no longer defined by their town borders.

It means that providing a hand-up can happen anywhere in the world by any group of people. In Regina, we saw it last year through the RCMP "Depot" Division working alongside Habitat for Humanity to build its Mountie House.

Or with the leadership of June Draude, my MLA for Kelvington-Wadena and Minister for Social Services - who sponsored a Habitat for Humanity Women build in Saskatoon last year – for women who want to learn construction skills and build homes.

The province provided \$50,000 for the housing development.

Abroad, we've seen it through the Canadian Forces' Disaster Assistance Response Team deploying to Sri Lanka after the devastating tsunami in 2004 or after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010.

When I worked with my colleagues on the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, this spirit of community was evident in so many people we spoke to. Soldiers, Afghans, diplomats, ex-pats – all felt a sense of purpose.

It may have been difficult to see from so far away, but Canada's presence in Afghanistan has never been for naught.

Afghanistan will never be like North America or Europe. Nor should it be. But the role that the International Security Assistance Force has empowered the Afghan people to take back the reigns of their country and the conditions are far better than they were 10 years ago.

It requires what he calls strategic patience –

And while your efforts have built homes, theirs has let little girls and young women go to school.

It's trained teachers, an army and police force. It's built roads, dams and irrigation systems. A new parliament. These actions – like yours – are the greatest demonstration of humanity that one can give.

So what do we take away from all of this?

How do we bundle these lessons and experiences and use them to build the future?

That is the challenge.

It's difficult to rise above the din of people saying we live in uncertain times. Whether it's our fragile economy, looming government austerity measures or dealing with personal debt, our health, or simply making ends meet.

How do we face all of these challenges and push ahead for a better future?

By stepping up –by paying it forward.

My father once said to me that anger and negativity should be kept “ice cold, not red hot.” It took me a while to fully understand what he meant, but when the penny dropped it was an important revelation.

There's no sense in wasting energy dwelling on your previous actions or mistakes, or blaming others for things that have happened in the past. To turn a negative into a positive is the most effective channeling you can do.

I cherish those moments and the power of serendipity in our lives.... small events; a crisis; moments in time; subtle, silent forces – that can change your life . . . if you'll let them!

I can say that keeping it “ice cold” has enabled me to rise above some of the most challenging times in my life.

The challenges your organization faces are significant – with 1.3 million Canadians struggling to get by without a safe, decent and affordable place to live – there is a housing issue that is eating away at the fabric of Canada's communities.

Working with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Habitat for Humanity has been innovative, with initiatives such as the Aboriginal Housing Program. Ottawa is pleased to partner with such a worthy cause.

But beyond such partnerships, you have also managed to harness the incredible power of the individual who cares about public service –in the truest sense of that phrase --- to meet and take on the challenges of the day.

Fifty thousand volunteers and thousands more who help abroad through your Global Village program.

You have the people power equivalent to a mid-sized city at your fingertips to renew and inspire communities.

It is the type of home that Habitat for Humanity is trying to build – one nail at a time.

Thank you so much for not only for building those homes, but empowering communities and people around the world.

And be proud of what you have accomplished!!!