

The Daily Tar Heel

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A Hand Up

Habitat for Humanity's grant to the Orange County chapter will provide much-needed affordable housing in Efland.

Most times, social problems can best be tackled by partnerships between organizations within a community.

Such is the case with a recent grant given by the N.C. Chamber of Commerce to Habitat for Humanity of Orange County. The \$250,000 Community Development Block Grant given will help build 25 homes in Efland in northern Orange County. The homes will be sold to first-time low-income homeowners.

Part of the appeal of this partnership is the partner itself: Habitat for Humanity. The nonprofit volunteer organization has done wonders in communities all across the country. In Orange County alone, it has helped to build 50 homes for low-income families since its creation in 1987.

Habitat for Humanity provides "a hand up, not a handout," as the organization says. As part of the "down payment" for the home, the families must put in between 300 and 600 hours of their own labor to help build their home.

Habitat calls it "sweat equity." It allows the family to have pride in themselves - and helps them feel more attached to their abode because they build it with their own hands.

And homes are desperately in demand in

Orange County.

According to data from the U.S. Census, Orange County's population rose from 93,662 to 111,533 in the last 10 years alone. That's a jump of more than 17,000 residents. The housing market has not been able to keep up with demand - especially in the area of affordable housing.

With so many affluent residents seeking to move into the University area - and the Triangle as a whole - developers can make more of a profit by building higher-end homes than they can with mixed-income subdivisions.

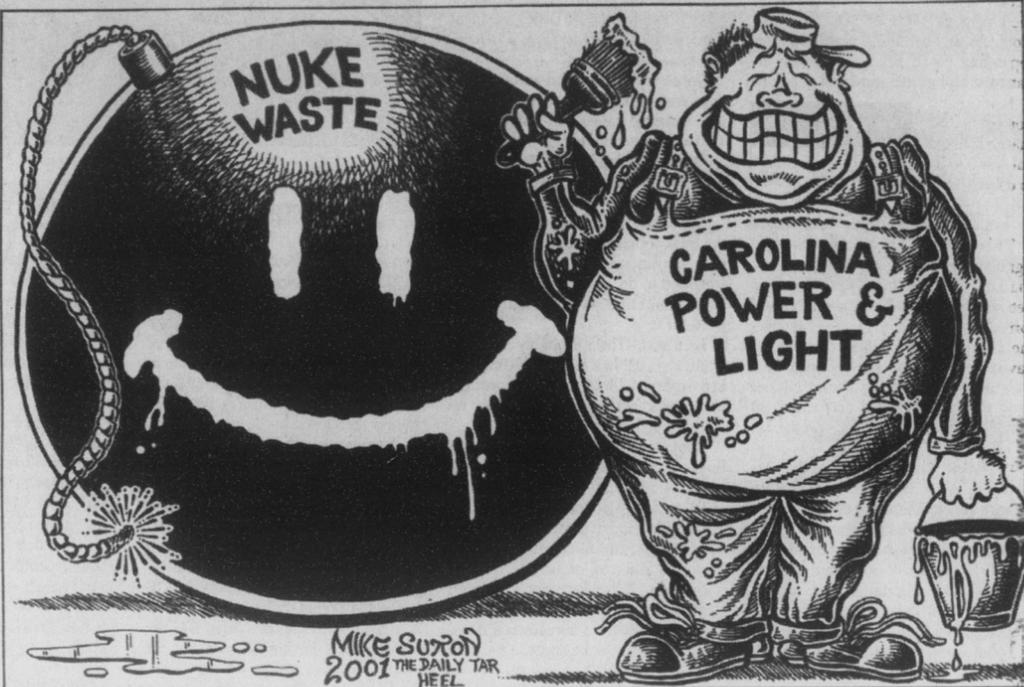
But with a poverty rate in North Carolina of about 13 percent and a median household income of more than \$30,000, many residents are left out in the cold - literally.

That's where organizations like Habitat for Humanity step in.

They fill in the gap that the state and federal governments cannot fill. And they rely on the support of communities to keep going.

Habitat for Humanity is an example of the best kind of "welfare." As the organization is proud to note, it is not giving a handout.

Instead, they are giving hardworking families an opportunity to live the American dream - owning a home.



Labor Rights Worthy of Your Time

Where were all of you last Wednesday at noon? You missed an important event at the Old Well. Several students were trying to spread the word about the human rights abuses in a factory in Mexico - a factory that makes UNC apparel.

On Jan. 9, 800 workers walked out of the factory in Mexico where they are employed. This factory, Kukdong, has a contract with Nike and makes sweatshirts for UNC, Indiana University and the universities of Michigan, Oregon and Arizona.

Their walk-out was a protest against low wages, rotten food in the cafeterias, failure to pay Christmas bonuses as mandated by Mexican law and the firing of five workers who were trying to form a union in response to these abuses.

The workers had simple demands of the Kukdong management: 1) recognize the independent union the workers were forming, 2) disregard the current management-appointed union that was not working for what's in the workers' best interests and 3) reinstate illegally fired workers.

The contract UNC formed with Nike concerning its code of conduct has clearly been violated. In a "preliminary" statement of findings, the Worker Rights Consortium, a factory watchdog of which UNC is a part, concluded that there are "strong grounds for concern that Kukdong may stand in violation of provisions of (University) codes of conduct governing child labor, physical and verbal abuse, payment of minimum or living wages, and free association."

In particular, the WRC delegation found compelling evidence, including an admission by Kukdong's general manager, that workers were hit by plant supervisors using hammers and screwdrivers, and that the factory employed workers under age 16.

Not only does Nike have a code of conduct that protects workers' from abuses like the ones that allegedly occurred at Kukdong, but UNC, through the Worker Rights Consortium, has a contract with Nike to ensure that the workers' rights are respected when Nike fails to do this.

Both pacts are being broken here. Nike has



LINDA CHUPKOWSKI
UNFORTUNATELY
REVOLUTIONARY

a responsibility to clean up the mess in its factory, yet is being slow to act. When this happens, UNC's leaders have a responsibility to pressure Nike. Chancellor James Moeser needs to speak out adamantly against this violation of contracts, demonstrating that our university will not allow these problems to continue in any aspect as it relates to UNC and its apparel.

I know many of you were not there on Wednesday because you don't necessarily see what the big deal is with unions anyway. Unions are simply a way for workers to band together to petition for change from their management.

But CEOs of clothing-making companies do not take them for granted. They recognize that these laws do not exist, or are not enforced in "developing" nations so they move their factories there to benefit from their lax labor codes. That way, they can cut corners to increase their profits.

Why do we have such faith in these multi-million-dollar corporations whose only goal is to make a profit? If I, a privileged, economically stable, American decided to "help out" someone who was homeless by having him or her live in a shack in my back yard and sew all my clothes for less money than he or she could feed his or her family with and made him or her work from sunup to sundown, would no one have a problem with this? Would I be widely supported for "helping" this person?

I saw a political cartoon once that described the issue well. It had a skinny per-

son hanging onto the edge of a cliff for dear life. A fat man stood safely above in a position to help the skinny person. Was he helping? Sure. He was holding out a glimmering sword labeled "sweatshops" for the struggling person to grab onto.

Still, you might wonder, "What do the workers themselves think? If I asked them, wouldn't they say they were thankful to the Nike and other American corporations for providing jobs?"

Just because many workers might say this, it does not mean that what the corporations are doing is right.

Sure, the workers are thankful for having jobs, but this is because they have no other options. Our profit-driven corporations have set it up so that working for them is the only available choice. The workers have to take these jobs despite the terrible treatment they receive.

Even if the Mexicans simply work harder, as many suggest they need to do, they will never be able to have the standard of living we have here in the United States. The United States is 5 percent of the world's population and consumes 40 percent of the world's resources. So, unless we are willing to make some sacrifices, the Third World will never catch up.

It's time we stop blaming the victims and start focusing on the real criminal: unregulated corporate America.

Nike, take some responsibility for your workers and meet their demands. Of course, many of us would rather you moved your factories back to the United States. But start with cleaning up the situation in Kukdong.

To Moeser and the Labor Task Force: Increase the pressure on Nike. And to the students: We need your help in sending a message. Make sure you show up next time. You cannot deny that you are affected by a situation simply by ignoring it. Take responsibility for your part.

Linda Chupkowski is a believer in human rights for all. E-mail her for more information about labor struggle at UNC at linda_chupkowski@unc.edu.

Operation Dong

Moeser is not doing enough to correct Nike's injustices. He should make it his responsibility to feed each fired worker.

This past week, about 10 enlightened members of Students for Economic Justice, a.k.a. SEJ, (not to be confused with the campus groups STD, SURGE, or Serge Zwickler) held a protest against unfair labor practices at a Nike factory in Mexico.

Nike, which is the official provider of athletic apparel to UNC, allegedly fired workers for complaining about poor food - apparently there is no Cosmic Cantina at the Kukdong International factory in Puebla, Mexico - and low wages.

Our own Chancellor James Moeser took a stand, sending a letter to Nike informing the company that UNC is aware of supposed code violations at the factory, while also demanding that the workers' basic rights be preserved.

Though it certainly can't be classified as a strong stance, most less-progressive people would nonetheless see the letter as a sufficient response to a serious concern.

Thank Jeebus for SEJ.

If it weren't for the few brave souls who weathered the frigid 50-degree conditions to protest in their Carolina apparel, probably all manufactured in the bastion of economic justice that is Southeast Asia, this issue probably would have just faded off The Daily Tar Heel radar like a story about '80s night at Lenoir Dining Hall.

But because SEJ members stood for what

they believed in, it's now clear that Moeser's letter isn't enough.

After minutes of intense deliberation, here is a remarkably simple proposal solving the Kukdong crisis: Operation Dong.

For Operation Dong to be a success, it'll need the support of the biggest dong on campus: student government.

The three remaining members of our esteemed Student Congress will undoubtedly lead the way, as their revolutionary sanctions against Iraq continue to shake the world economy, and their moratorium on the death penalty has saved countless prisoners from being executed unfairly.

After Congress decides to dissolve for good, donating all of its student fees now and in the future to Operation Dong, and the chancellor donates the 23-cent check written to him by SEJ, the funding will be in place to build a new economically justified factory in Chapel Hill.

After a Julius Peppers visit to the Immigration and Naturalization Service takes care of the formalities, there'll simply be a swap of Congress members for factory workers, and Operation Dong will be complete.

No Student Congress, a factory to provide jobs to liberal arts graduates right here in Chapel Hill and a Julius Peppers reference - who said that activism was dead?

The Daily Tar Heel

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READERS' FORUM

Cartoonist Takes Low Blow at Greek Community Members

TO THE EDITOR:
I must voice the particular offense I took to Scott Rooker's editorial cartoon "Frat Boy Action Figures" published in the Jan. 25 paper.

As a member of the Greek community, I laugh at the majority of the DTH cartoons that poke fun at the "fratty" style.
However, the line between opinion and defamation must be respected.

At first glance Rooker's cartoon appeared just as harmless as any other, until I reached his caption: "Jeep and cocaine sold separately!"
I feel Rooker has crossed the aforementioned line!

Rooker could have substituted a number of relevant qualities such as "frat flops, bow ties, or Oakleys sold separately."

Instead, he opted for a low blow, thus shifting his theme from humor to malice.

I dig my "fratty" style, I like my Croakies (by the way, there's an "a" in Croakie), and I love my Jeep.

However, I do not condone the use of cocaine.

Rooker failed to consider the strong sense of association and brotherhood upon which the Greek community relies.

Therefore, his unfounded and generalized claim that cocaine is as integral a part of the fraternity system as Dave Matthews Band inherently suggests that my friends do cocaine!

Furthermore, when I pull up to my fraternity's house in a Jeep, what is to stop a passer-by from assuming that since I fit the first two criteria of Rooker's cartoon, I fit the third?

The DTH cartoons targeted at the Greek community are drafted by individuals on the outside, looking in through clouded glass.

Any journalist wishing to voice an opinion, whether via cartoon or column, bears the responsibility of doing so while remaining within the bounds of slander.

Cocaine is not a fraternity staple. Rooker's cartoon crossed the line

from humorous opinion to slanderous accusation, which merits a written apology to our campus Greeks.

Scott Morgan
Sophomore
Business and Music
Kappa Alpha Fraternity

Do You Want to Blow Off Steam?

Then write an op-ed column for The Daily Tar Heel.

Op-ed pieces are usually 700 to 800 words long and run on Monday's Viewpoints page.

The Viewpoints page offers student groups an excellent way to get their opinion out on an issue or publicize an upcoming event. Students can sound off on any University, state or national news story that sparks their interest.

Include your name, year, major, hometown and e-mail address. Columns should not be signed by more than two people.

Got any questions? Contact Editorial Page Editor Jonathan Chaney at jchaney@email.unc.edu for more information.



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail editdesk@unc.edu.