

Dr. John Sallstrom

Habitat for Humanity Milledgeville-Baldwin County

Honorary member and former president

Habitat: How did you first become involved with HFHMBC? Why did you choose to serve on the HFHMBC board?

Sallstrom: In the early 90s, there was major racial conflict in the community, so the city and county governments set up a Human Relations Commission to which I was appointed. A white woman who had earlier unsuccessfully tried to start a Habitat affiliate in Milledgeville came to one of our meetings with a black friend who needed a decent home and asked us to consider establishing an affiliate, not only to build houses for those in need, identified as a major problem in the community, but also build better racial relations. I was asked to chair an exploratory committee, and after several meetings, we decide to proceed with incorporation and affiliation with Habitat International. I was familiar with Habitat because on Palm Sunday weekend in 1979, one of my students invited me to go with him and several others to visit Koinonia Farm in Americus, where Habitat was born. At that time, we also saw the first Habitat houses being built in Americus. I was glad to have this opportunity to follow-up on what we had learned. I also believed Habitat would provide a good opportunity for students to get involved in building better relationships with the community.

Habitat: What do your responsibilities on the HFHMBC board entail?

Sallstrom: As the first president, I was very active, not only in all aspects of organizing the affiliate, but also in acquiring our first property and building our first house. Our initial goal was to complete it by Christmas after we started, but we ran into several problems along the way, and we didn't actually close on the house until the following Christmas Eve. My main role now is to offer prayers, financial support and moral support as a kind of "elder statesman" on the board.

Habitat: What is the most rewarding part of being on the HFHMBC board for you?

Sallstrom: To me, the most rewarding part has been building relationships with many folks in the community whom I would never have encountered if I had just stayed in the classroom or on campus. It is exciting to plant seeds and see them bear much fruit despite obstacles we sometimes encountered such as vandalism, misunderstandings and inexperience. Working with volunteers can be very frustrating, but also very heart-warming when they are willing to step up and do things in unexpected ways. I was blessed to learn that God really does provide whatever we need.

Habitat: What do you do in the community outside of HFHMBC?

Sallstrom: I am now retired as professor emeritus of philosophy and religion at Georgia College and former associate vice president for academic services. I still try to support the Honors and Scholars Program that I started more than 40 years ago. I have been pleased that many honors students have participated in Habitat projects over the years. I also serve on the program committee for Learning in Retirement at GC and am a member of Baldwin

County Retired Teachers Association. In addition, I currently serve as chair of the Ethics Committee at Oconee Regional Medical Center, secretary of Maranatha Outreach, Inc., our homeless shelter and a member of the Division of Family and Children Services (DFACS) board.

Habitat: What are some hobbies that you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Sallstrom: One of my retirement projects has been to read all the Great Books, some of which I first studied years ago as a student and others of which I have never read. I also like to read many other books and magazines to keep my mind active. In addition, I try to walk at least a mile and a half every weekday morning and longer on weekends to remain physically active. Helping take care of five grandchildren is another good way to stay busy. I think I spend too much time going to doctors and funerals!