



TEXAS LOW INCOME HOUSING INFORMATION SERVICE

HOUSING MATTERS

A newsletter dedicated to the goal that every Texan should have decent, safe, affordable housing

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2006 Houser Awards honor four passionate Texans



November 8, 2006-- The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TxLIHIS) believes that decent, safe, affordable housing is a basic right that every Texas family deserves. Today we are honoring four individuals who have devoted their lives to fighting for this right with a 2006 Texas Houser Award.

The 2006 honorees are: Heather Way, attorney and housing advocate; Ruth Cedillo, retired deputy state housing director; Standish Meacham, University of Texas at Austin professor emeritus; and Austin Mayor Will Wynn. TxLIHIS Board President Veon McReynolds, Ph.D. along with TxLIHIS staff Karen Paup, John Henneberger, and Gloria Romo are presenting the awards.

Each year, TxLIHIS gives three individuals or organizations a Texas Houser Award. The awards are given in three categories: community houser, activist houser, and government houser. This year, we are also presenting a special houser award to TxLIHIS' board member and longtime supporter Standish Meacham, who has been a passionate advocate for housing justice since TxLIHIS was founded almost 20 years ago.

The term "houser" has its roots in history: in the 1930's reformers and activists calling themselves "housers" dedicated themselves to eliminating widespread poverty that was characterized by substandard and unaffordable housing.

The housers were guided by the belief that everyone deserves a safe, decent, affordable home and they worked to improve living conditions for the very poor. Their tactics combined social science and popular journalism, architectural experimentation and political activism.

The work of these anti-poverty pioneers became such an integral part of history that dictionaries of the time included a definition of "houser" as "a person committed to raising the quality of life through improving the availability of and access to shelter for low-income families."

HOUSER (hau'zr) a person committed to raising the quality of life through improving the availability of and access to shelter for low-income families.

Today, dedicated individuals continue to take action to improve the substandard and unaffordable conditions that affect over two million poor Texans. They have approached this challenge from multiple sectors and in their own way, have helped change the conditions that perpetuate poverty.

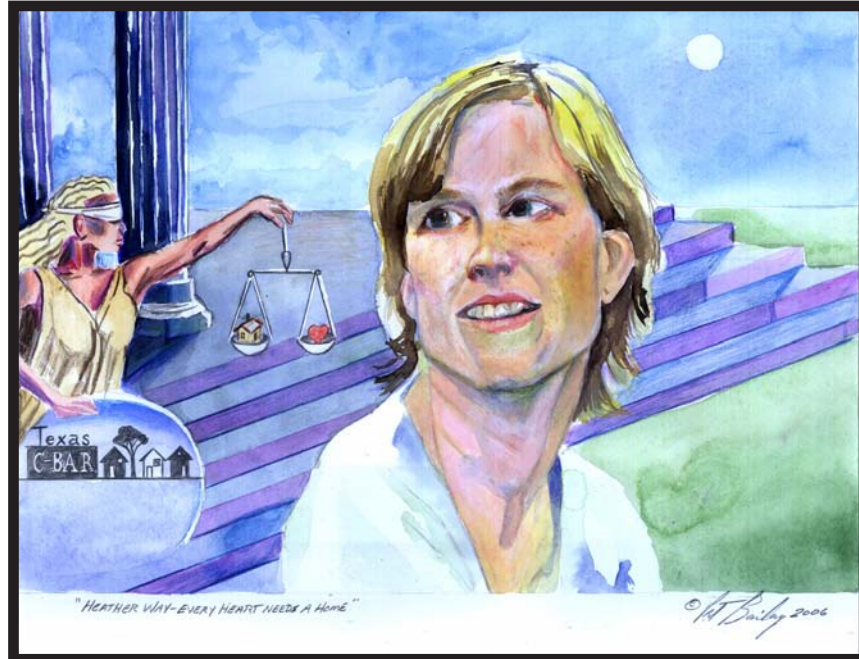
Heather began as a young law student, when she helped found the University of Texas Community Development Clinic and Texas C-BAR that provides law services to support affordable housing. Today she remains a strong voice for housing at the Texas Legislature. Ruth took a leading role at the state housing agency to help thousands of extremely poor border families connect to water services. As mayor of Texas' most expensive city, Mayor Wynn recognizes the need to provide housing opportunities to the working families that make up the fabric of Austin. Standish led the Texas Housing Colloquium to examine housing from a historical and social perspective and enliven public discourse on the issue.

The Texas Houser Awards acknowledge these Texans who recognize the injustice of poverty housing and work to eliminate this injustice through systemic change. TxLIHIS believes that the housing crisis will only be solved through the committed efforts of advocates, community leaders and policy makers like Heather, Ruth, Standish and Mayor Wynn. These honorees know that an affordable home offers more than just a place to live, but also the promise of greater opportunities for low-income families.

2005 Texas Houser Award winners

Heather Way *activist houser*

Heather Way, attorney, housing advocate and lecturer at the University of Texas Law School, is known for her tireless efforts to advance affordability for low-income families through state and local housing policy. Heather helped found and directed the UT Housing Law Clinic and Texas C-BAR, which matches pro bono legal representation with community organizations that are working to improve the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods. Heather is also spearheading the Austin Downtown Housing Forum to make Austin's downtown affordable to low- and moderate-income families. In 2005, Heather drafted and helped pass ground-breaking land banking legislation that helps maintain housing affordability in Austin neighborhoods that have been home to low-income families for generations, but are facing the pressures of gentrification.



2005 Houser Award sponsors (as of October 26)

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Ruth Cedillo *government houser*

During her tenure as deputy director of the state's housing agency, Ruth Cedillo worked tirelessly to set a higher standard for how the agency responds to the housing needs of Texas' poorest families. Ruth played a pivotal role in establishing the Housing Infrastructure Fund at the housing agency, which provides grant money to help low-income border colonia residents connect to water and sewer services. When a massive tornado wiped out the small town of Jarrell, Texas, Ruth took initiative to identify relief funds for housing and public facilities, despite the fact that the state received no federal resources. "The wonderful thing about Ruth Cedillo," said colleague Sandy Mauro, "is that it has always been her belief that you treat people with respect and dignity. She believes there is always a way to help them, and you need to do it."



develop innovative solutions to Texas poverty

Austin Mayor Will Wynn *community houser*

As mayor of Austin, Will Wynn is working hard to make the city a vibrant, affordable community for families of all incomes who call Austin home. In the wake of last year's devastating hurricanes, Mayor Wynn personally welcomed evacuee families to Austin and is heading up Austin's effort to help them start anew. This spring, under the Mayor's leadership, the Austin City Council recommended to the voters a \$55 million housing bond to improve housing safety and affordability for Austin's most vulnerable families.



Mary Sanger
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Kathleen Tyler

Robert & Angela Ward
Cecilia Wood
Stephen Yelenosky & Jill McRae
United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc.

Standish Meacham *special houser*

Standish Meacham is a passionate advocate for housing rights. An internationally respected historian, Standish is the former dean of Liberal Arts and chair of the UT Austin History Department. As chair of the Texas Housing Colloquia, he brought together housers from diverse backgrounds to examine the historical and social aspects of US housing policy. Standish is a founding member of the Texas Housing Forum, which works to advance public support for affordable housing across the state. He is a current board member and past TxLIHIS board president.



Support the Houser Awards

You can join the sponsors and contributors listed above in supporting the Texas Houser Awards and the work of the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TxLIHIS) by making a tax-deductible contribution.

The mission of TxLIHIS is to support low-income Texans' efforts to achieve the American Dream of a decent, affordable home in a quality neighborhood. We pursue our mission by:

- Organizing and empowering low-income people and communities to take the initiative to solve their community development problems;
- Advocating safe, clean, decent housing for all Texas families;

The artist

For the past three years, the Houser Awards portraits have been the work of Pat Bailey, an artist with Art From the Streets (AFTS), a local arts program for the homeless. Last year, sales of Pat's art supported her move into an apartment of her own. Previously, Pat worked on her art in parking lots, in public parks and churches, or wherever someone would offer her space. Having a stable place to call home has helped Pat advance her career as an artist.

Pat portrays the unique personalities of the Houser Awards honorees through vivid watercolor portraits. She uses her creative talent to create images that reflect the honorees' contributions toward housing justice.



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Three Texans honored with
2005 Texas Houser Awards