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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Habitat Orlando & Osceola presents lifetime service award to former U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez at inaugural housing forum

ORLANDO, Fla. (April 15, 2026) – [Habitat for Humanity Greater Orlando & Osceola County](#) honored former U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez for his achievements in housing innovation with the Senator Mel Martinez Lifetime Service Award during its inaugural Cornerstone Housing® Forum: Aligning Vision, Measurement, and Action.

During Tuesday’s event, housing experts and community leaders explored the pillars of Habitat Orlando & Osceola’s Cornerstone Housing platform, including how stable, affordable housing serves as the cornerstone of community progress and how we can align around measurable, systems-level solutions to face the housing crisis.

“We believe that affordable and stable housing is not just about shelter—it’s the foundation for thriving individuals, families, and communities,” said Catherine Steck McManus, President & CEO, Habitat for Humanity Greater Orlando & Osceola County. “We’re grateful to have gathered housing experts and community leaders to further our shared understanding of how we can increase affordable housing options and find a foundation of hope in the face of the housing crisis.”

Habitat Orlando & Osceola presented the inaugural Lifetime Service Award, which has been named after Sen. Martinez, in recognition of his lifelong commitment to innovative housing policy development. In his remarks, he highlighted the importance of advocating for policy changes to effectively address the housing crisis.

“By building one home, you can help one family—and that’s great, for that family that’s everything—but if you can help 100 families, or 1,000 families, or 10,000 families when you alter policy in a beneficial way to make housing more affordable, you really are solving a lot of societal problems today,” Martinez said.

The Cornerstone Housing Forum also featured a panel discussion of local faith and community leaders moderated by Rev. Dr. David Swanson, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, and Habitat Orlando & Osceola board member. Panelists shared their unique

perspectives, reflecting on how building better connections with the faith community, an already-motivated volunteer workforce of roughly 400,000 people in Central Florida, is critical to addressing current housing challenges.

The forum was hosted as part of [Home is the Key](#), Habitat for Humanity's annual initiative during Fair Housing Month to help open doors to equitable homeownership and stronger communities across the nation. Home is the Key is the first major U.S. activation of the Let's Open the Door campaign, Habitat for Humanity's global campaign to bring awareness of the worldwide housing crisis through door pop-up installations, on-the-ground builds, and digital storytelling across more than 60 countries. The door pop-up installation will be displayed at [Orlando's Lake Eola Park Washington Plaza](#) this weekend, April 18 and 19. Click [here](#) to learn more.

A full recording of Tuesday's forum is available [here](#), and high-res photos are available to download [here](#).

About Habitat for Humanity Greater Orlando & Osceola County

Habitat for Humanity Greater Orlando & Osceola County is driven by a vision where everyone has an affordable place to call home, a stable foundation that fosters health, opportunity, and progress for all. Habitat Orlando & Osceola pioneers innovative housing solutions, empowers individuals through knowledge, and transforms communities by addressing the root causes of the housing crisis. Founded in 1986, Habitat Orlando & Osceola has built, rehabbed or repaired over 900 homes throughout Central Florida. Through home builds, repairs, housing counseling, financial education classes, and other programming, Habitat Orlando & Osceola serves more than 2,000 people each year. The nonprofit has achieved recognition as one of the 40 "top producers" out of over 900 Habitat for Humanity International affiliates working in communities throughout the United States and in more than 60 countries. To learn more, visit [HabitatOrlando.org](#).

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