

# “Hey, Mr. Walker!”

*Community organizer works to revitalize an urban neighborhood*

Walker Moore is a tall, lanky, red-haired Oklahoman who grew up farming and ranching in the western part of the state. Today, he and wife, Tasha, and infant daughter Ava live and work in North Waco — a once-decaying urban neighborhood that is slowly reinventing itself, and is about as far from Walker’s roots as one can imagine.

“When I first started working in the neighborhood, I was approached by drug dealers and verbally assaulted for being an informant,” Moore says. Three years later, he now is often stopped by folks when he’s out walking and children holler out on their way home from school, “Hey, Mr. Walker!”

Moore works with Waco Community Development, a Christian-based organization committed to promoting housing, community and economic development throughout Waco. Part of the group’s objective is to promote mixed-income housing, and in North Waco it has built and sold 30 houses and renovated and sold nine others.

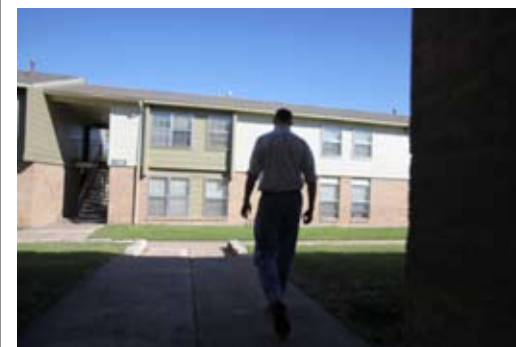
“Gentrification with justice brings stable, income-earning families back into this neighborhood, not to push its current residents out, but to provide opportunities for all races and incomes to live and work together,” he said.

There are other positive changes in the neighborhood. Moore points out a new sidewalk connecting one of the elementary schools in the neighborhood to a large, low-income apartment complex. He mentions that West Avenue Elementary School has received state recognition the last two years.

“That just wouldn’t have happened two years ago,” he says. A large park, once a hangout for dealers, prostitutes and the homeless, now is the site for Pop Warner football, with parents and children lining the fields.

“No one group can accomplish community renewal,” Moore said. “It takes public and private sectors, lots of people coming together to invest in a future.” — Vicki Marsh Kabat

2009 © BAYLOR SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK



BAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY