

# Rebuild Austin Honored as 250th Partnership

**Rebuild Austin** (TX) hosted the 250th Rebuild America Partnership Celebration in grand Texas style on February 17.

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary **Bill Richardson** joined U.S. Congressman **Lloyd Doggett**, Austin Mayor **Kirk Watson**, partnership representatives **Rev. Marvin C. Griffin** and **I.Q. Hurdle**, and other local and state officials at a neighborhood block party outside the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church to honor Austin as the 250th Partnership. The occasion, an eagerly awaited milestone for Rebuild America, culminated with Mayor Watson declaring February 17 as "Rebuild America Day" throughout Austin.

The Rebuild Austin partnership plans to transform buildings in the economically depressed East Austin neighborhood surrounding Ebenezer Church into models of energy efficiency. Targeted buildings include the Ebenezer Baptist Church, an educational center, a daycare center, small businesses, senior housing and



*Austin City Council Member Willie Lewis, left, joins Energy Secretary Bill Richardson at the Rebuild Austin event.*

low-income housing. One building will be converted into a training center to provide job skills for local residents and new business opportunities for the community. Austin Energy, the local utility and a Rebuild Austin partner, has donated a 6-kw roof-mounted photovoltaic panel system for the daycare center. MetalOptics, a manufacturer of efficient lighting fixtures, has donated over 50 energy-saving fixtures to the church.

"By working through a church-based neighborhood, Rebuild Austin and DOE are successfully addressing community concerns

# Rebuild Austin

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about housing, utility bills and future economic growth," says Hurdle, project director for the East Austin Economic Development Corporation, the lead partner in Rebuild Austin.

A local blues band, powering their instruments with solar energy, kicked off the celebration for the crowd of 300. I.Q. Hurdle welcomed the audience, Rev. Griffin led a prayer and Council Member **Willie Lewis** addressed the revitalization effort in East Austin. Austin Energy Vice President **Roger Duncan** spoke about his utility's involvement with Rebuild Austin, including its Green Choice renewable energy program and its donation of the photovoltaic panels. Mayor Watson addressed Austin's energy concerns and then introduced the Secretary of Energy.

"The Department is extremely pleased and proud to be a partner in Rebuild Austin," said Richardson. "This effort demonstrates that energy efficiency can be used to revitalize an economically depressed neighborhood so that it can participate in the economic boom that many communities across the nation are enjoying."



Bill Richardson, center, accompanied by Congressman Lloyd Doggett (D-Austin) to his left and City Council Member Willie Lewis, is surrounded by a gaggle of reporters.

Richardson remarked on Rebuild America's 250th milestone and on how energy efficiency can address some of Austin's problems, including economic development of disadvantaged neighborhoods and the City's air quality attainment standards. With February being Black History Month, the Secretary noted that many African American scientists had made significant advances in energy technologies.

The Secretary, Denver Regional Office Director **Bill Becker**, and Hurdle then presented recognition awards to the following Rebuild Austin partners: the Ebenezer Baptist Church, the East Austin Economic

Development Corporation, the Austin Department of Housing and Neighborhood Services, Austin Energy, the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, Texas A&M University, Liberty Bank, the

Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, EnviroTrans Solutions, the Texas Solar Energy Society, the Travis County Weatherization Program, the Sustainable Living Alliance, the Crescent Construction Company and MetalOptics.

Receiving an award on behalf of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Rev. Griffin said, "We are delighted to participate as a partner in Rebuild America. This community-based program, focusing on energy savings, will save thousands of dollars by contributing to the empowerment of depressed areas in Austin."

Richardson also recognized the work of Texas Rebuild America partners Kleberg County, Brazos County, and the Bryan Independent School District. Kingsville, TX Mayor **Phil Esquivel** also attended on behalf of his city and Kleberg County.

Children from the Ebenezer Child Development and Daycare Center, led by instructor **Huang Nguyen**, honored the Secretary with a song. The Secretary then toured Ebenezer Village, viewing lighting improvements by MetalOptics in the church foyer and visiting residents of the seniors center.

Following the event, Assistant Secretary of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy **Dan Reicher** and other DOE officials and Austin partnership representatives toured the MetalOptics manufacturing plant. **Cheryl English** of Lithonia Lighting, a Rebuild America Business Partner, introduced the "Basics of Efficient Lighting" guide, which is co-produced by Lithonia and Rebuild America. The Assistant Secretary addressed the future of clean energy products and DOE goals for clean energy.

The state of Texas has more than 15 Rebuild America partnerships that have generated more than \$11 million in private investments to renovate over 8.4 million square feet. Ninety-six jobs have been created and energy costs have been reduced by \$2.6 million. The energy-efficiency improvements are expected to reduce air pollution by more than 6,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually.



The Blues Specialists, their instruments powered by solar panels, take center stage.



## ***Meeting the Press***

Rebuild America's 250th partnership celebration in Austin attracted strong local media interest, especially from television news stations. NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX affiliates were all on site and the story aired 12 times. The presence of Secretary Richardson gave the story some "bounce" and the Secretary fielded some press questions about rising fuel prices as well as queries about Rebuild America and Rebuild Austin. Mike Myers, DOE representative for Texas, Rev. Griffin and members of the Ebenezer Church community were also interviewed. The Austin American-Statesman, the city daily, weighed in with a top story for their Metro & State section titled, "An efficient blessing for a house of prayer." Richardson was quoted as saying: "We have got to conserve energy. We have to look at renewables – wind, solar, biomass."

*The Austin American-Statesman was among the many news outlets covering the event.*