

NYCHA CHAIRMAN JOHN B. RHEA  
NEW YORK ELECTED LEADERS HONOR SMITH HOUSES PRESIDENT AND VOLUNTEERS  
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2011 – 5:45 PM  
SMITH HOUSES TENANT ASSOCIATION ROOM, 15 ST. JAMES PLACE, NYC

Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman. To Senator Squadron, Speaker Silver, Council Member Chin, Smith Houses Association President Torres, residents of Smith Houses, colleagues and friends—it is indeed a pleasure to be with you to celebrate the courage, resolve and the amazing spirit of community that was shown here at Smith Houses—and all across our great city—during Hurricane Irene.

In the days leading up to the storm, and even as Irene traveled along the East Coast, there was a debate about the storm's strength and its potential impact. But what was never in doubt was the commitment of New Yorkers to stand together and to support one another in a time of need. That commitment was on display last weekend, and nowhere was it brighter than right here at Smith Houses.

Resident Association President Aixa Torres and the Smith Houses Resident Association Board quickly and calmly sprang into action

when we received direction from Mayor Bloomberg and city officials that residents living in Zone A needed to evacuate. Zone A is the area that received the full force of Irene's wind and rain and faced the greatest threat of flooding, so alerting residents and moving them to safety was a priority for NYCHA, our resident leaders, elected leaders and our partners throughout the city, especially at the FDNY and NYPD.

Going door to door, Mrs. Torres joined NYCHA employees—not only those who worked at Smith Houses, but many employees from across the Authority who volunteered their weekend to support their fellow New Yorkers—to notify residents of the potential danger, help families move to shelter, and provide particular support to our residents with special needs and disabilities.

Mrs. Torres, as a leader, as a community advocate and as a New Yorker, represents the very best of our city and the very best of NYCHA and we are grateful to her and proud of her outstanding contribution—thank you, Mrs. Torres.

I am also very proud to have several of my colleagues with us today. It's in times like these that I am reminded that the word "colleague" doesn't fully convey the depth of our partnership and our commitment to the families of public housing.

With unrelenting courage, many NYCHA employees worked around the clock—at Smith Houses, at the other 25 developments in Zone A, and all across New York City—to notify, to evacuate and to support families. They were prepared, they were ready and they acted with the dedication that is their trademark. To all of NYCHA's employees—thank you.

I want to thank four of New York's finest legislators—our champions in Albany, Senator Daniel Squadron and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver—and the Lower East Side's trailblazer, Council Member Rosie Mendez and a stalwart ally to the families of public housing, Council Member Margaret Chin.

Senator Squadron was outstanding, making sure that NYCHA had buses to transport residents from their homes to the emergency shelters.

Speaker Silver's team was a constant support, helping to provide translation services for residents who are not proficient English speakers.

And Council Member Chin went door to door notifying families, helping residents evacuate, and providing support as a translator. Whenever NYCHA needs each of you, you never fail to answer the call, so thank you.

This weekend was a testament to the incredible talent and heart found here at Smith Houses and in communities all across New York. Faced with an immense challenge, New Yorkers thought of others first, we pulled together as only strong communities can, and exemplified the very best of the public-minded service that makes New York City great. As we continue to work together to empower families and strengthen our communities, we should all be proud of what we have achieved and encouraged by all we will do in the future.

On behalf of the residents of Smith Houses and every NYCHA family—thank you very much.