

## In death, man rekindles passion for Little Forest Hills neighborhood in White Rock Lake area



Rex C. Curry/Special Contributor

Connie Powell (left) and Linda Calvert stand in front of the Little Forest Hills home of Billy "Bill" Fred Walker. Walker, who died earlier this year, willed the proceeds from the sale of his estate to Fix-It-Folks. The organization was begun in the aftermath of a 2005 fire that destroyed Walker's home.

By JAMES RAGLAND, Staff Writer, Published: 19 June 2012 03:44 PM

In life and in death, Bill Walker found a way to show his neighbors how much he loved them.

Hundreds of White Rock Lake-area residents and others across Texas rallied to help the retired warehouse manager and former Navy seaman rebuild his 837-square-foot frame home after a fire gutted it seven years ago.

The effort inspired a charitable cause, the Fix-It-Folks, a neighborhood group that helps cash-strapped residents of Little Forest Hills — an eclectic, funky enclave of 949 houses — with minor repairs to their homes.

And now, thanks to Walker, Fix-It-Folks is poised to spread its wings as never before.

Billy "Bill" Fred Walker, 81, died on March 22 — the exact date the fire engulfed his home in 2005.

And in his will, the man who befriended all who crossed his path earmarked the proceeds from his estate sale for Fix-It-Folks.

“He wanted to give back to folks like they gave to him,” said Connie Powell, 56, who grew close to Walker after the fire. “He was a humble man with a big heart.”

Linda Calvert, 66, who runs Fix-It-Folks, said Walker’s “lucrative” gift may help the charity become a full-fledged, tax-exempt nonprofit.

Walker initially considered donating everything he owned to the Little Forest Hills Neighborhood Association, which annually funds the Fix-It-Folks campaign, his friends and neighbors say.

But he decided to give his 75-year-old home, which he and his late wife, Thelma, lived in for decades, to a sister-in-law down on her luck.

The sister-in-law plans to sell the home, said Powell, and use the money to fix up her house in Waco.

The rest of Walker’s possessions — including a Chevy Cavalier, bicycles he often rode through the neighborhood and an odd mix of collectibles — were sold at an estate sale earlier this month.

More important than Walker’s financial gift, which came to about \$10,000, was the way he touched people’s hearts, his friends and neighbors say.

“If I were out of town, he’d watch our house [and] pick up the mail,” said Max Davis, 61, who moved next door to Walker a year after the fire. “He’d do that for everybody.”

Davis and his wife, Denise, are co-presidents of the neighborhood association, which has recognized Walker for his volunteerism.

Walker was just a friendly, down-to-earth guy who put everyone at ease, Max Davis said.

“He was just always willing to help out,” he said. “And every year, he put up a sign in his yard thanking everybody who helped him after the fire.”

Indeed, neighbors say, the fire that gutted Walker’s home proved to be a gift as many blessings began to unfold: It revealed a tenderhearted old man, a caring community and the seldom-seen heart of a big city.

“We were really close after that,” said Powell, who once lived two blocks from Walker but didn’t know him well until she began organizing neighbors to help him rebuild. “He would say, ‘You’re the closest thing to a daughter I ever had.’”

A faulty gas furnace sparked the flames that burned Walker’s house.

“Well, as it turned out,” Powell wrote in a recent flier promoting the estate sale, “Bill lost his beloved wife Thelma to brain cancer several years before and the medical bills took their savings and current earnings to the point he had to let his home insurance go.”

“Bill was in a pickle,” she continued. “One of the neighbors asked him, ‘Bill, what will you do now?’ and he replied, ‘Well, I guess I’ll just sell the dirt and hop a train.’”

Instead, his neighbors hopped aboard Powell’s bandwagon and did all they could to help Walker back on his feet.

Hundreds of folks — from Dallas to Fort Worth and beyond — donated time, money, goods and services, enabling Walker to move back into his freshly restored home within six months.

“This is the house that love built,” Powell said.

Walker felt the same way.

“I don’t know how many remember that Dallas used to be called ‘Big D’ — and it still is ‘Big D’ because of Big Hearts, Big Kindness, Big Care and Big Help,” Walker wrote in a 2008 neighborhood newsletter article titled, “Angels on My Door.”

“Yes there were angels on my door step — front and back,” Walker wrote. “Many, many angels. Some live close by — some farther away. All came to help and all did.”