

Helping through homeownership

Seahawks personality shares stories of building community

By Dana Kampa
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“Do we aspire to care about housing because it makes economic sense?” asked Seattle Seahawks announcer Randy Rowland. “Certainly, we do. It is a part of the economy. Do we care about housing because it’s a form of social justice? Goodness yes we do. And do we care about housing because there’s a moral obligation behind that? And I think yes, we do. But at an even higher level, I think housing and people having housing reflects the very nature of humanity, how we were built. ... Housing is an essential foundation for a flourishing community.”

Rowland spoke to the importance of community and shelter during a summit on affordable workforce housing held at the beginning of the year in Union.

The Seahawks voice was ordained in the Presbyterian church in 1990, is a pastor at Seattle's Sanctuary Church CRC, and is the CEO of the nonprofit Green Bean Coffeehouse. He received Masters and Doctoral degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary and has authored several books. Rowland shared the insights he gained working within his community to shed light on how society can grow, starting with



Randy Rowland, Seattle Seahawks announcer, spoke about the importance of home ownership to a group of elected officials, private business owners and concerned citizens last month at the Alderbrook Resort & Spa in Union. *Journal photo by Dana Kampa*

the need for housing.

“One third ... of the millennial generation under 35 years old are living at home with parents or other family members,” Rowland said. “These are

not homeboys and homegirls who can't go anyplace else. They're working, they're part of the working stressed, and they have no other option for living."

“In my city of Seattle, the bare minimum to survive and afford a mortgage is a family income of \$125,000 a year

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Seahawks: Lots of barriers, but plenty of opportunities

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or more,” he said. “People who bring home just \$125,000 a year can expect to be paying somewhere around 48 or 50 percent of that in mortgage costs.”

Coupled with the high cost of housing is change to pay structures, which Rowland said are set up to avoid full-time employment. He pointed to his personal experience working at Sears.

“People were making lavished livings as assistant store managers, and people were starting right out of college, recruited to their management programs. They worked fulltime. Mable, who taught me how to work in the pet department, had worked for Sears for 45 years. She was a disabled woman who was missing one hand — she was a tremendous manager, and a tremendous woman to work for. She had that job until she could no longer work full time.”

Rowland said these opportunities began disappearing as large department stores and companies stopped hiring people full time for such positions.

“We have all kinds of jobs around America now that are 30 to 24 hours that pay no benefits,” he said.

Rowland explained how these societal shifts affect

“who we are as human beings and how we form vital and flourishing communities.”

Referencing Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which shows how people experience personal growth through five stages (physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization), Rowland showed how a community can grow if people help raise each other up.

“For those of us here, today, most of us are probably in the esteem and self-actualization area,” Rowland said to the attendees. “We live at the top of this pyramid. When you look at a school district in North Mason, where 70 percent of the children in school have subsidized lunches, when you look at the number of people that have subsidized health care and these things, you see that we have many friends and neighbors around us who have never tasted a sense of safety or belonging, because they’re still struggling to live at the physiological level. Maslow demonstrates that without our basic needs met, we can’t move up the pyramid.”

Not having a permanent address is not only a psychological barrier to personal growth, but also makes it challenging to get an ID necessary for job applications.

Rowland said he believed “opportunity” could be the answer, and community mem-

bers can help create those opportunities for others. In turn, as people climb higher on the hierarchy of needs, the more motivated they are to achieve their goals, connect with people and give back.

Rowland shared the story of his father, who lived and died at a home on Treasure Island. His neighbors were dear friends, and they helped make sure he could continue living in his home.

“We’re meant to have places where we have neighbors, and they know our names,” he said.

As an active community member, Rowland recalled several stories of helping people in Seattle who were struggling, one of whom was a set designer for TV news who fell on hard times.

After experiencing health issues that prevented him from being able to work as a carpenter, the man wound up living in a van.

Rowland said it took several years for the man to recover as they helped him get a new ID, apply for senior housing,

and get the care he needed to have his teeth rebuilt.

“At age 67, he finally has a place to live, he has a place to collect his checks, and he continues to serve in our neighborhood ... and he’s giving back,” Rowland said.

“Just to watch people who are shriveled, and you can almost imagine them as being brown or yellow — a bit sun parched — receive a little bit of fertilizer, a little bit of water and a little bit of light in their lives, and watch them take on color and open up to the world around them ...

it brings tears to my eyes.”

Supporting a community comes down to enabling people to do work that inspires them and have place to call their own.

“When people can’t work, they don’t feel good about themselves, they don’t feel right,” he said. “When people work too hard for not much money, or without thanks for their contributions and their gifts, they feel crummy. When you feel crummy, you don’t feel safe. You don’t feel love

and belonging. The weight of your own life is pushing you down, rather than elevating you.”

Inspired by a philosophical conversation with Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll about personal motivation, Rowland drew the conclusion that the importance of community is having people to call out the best in one another.

“This is all Pete is about, is just reminding people who they are,” he said. “He says the whole key to our success is helping people know who they are, having them know us so we know each other, and then simply reminding them who they are day in and day out.”

Rowland said when looking at issues such as affordable housing and a strong workforce, it’s important to set future generations up for success — starting out higher on the pyramid.

“Being a part of the welfare and prosperity of a neighborhood is a joy, and you can do that here,” he said. “We, together, can be more and better than we’ve ever been in Mason County. ... You and I have the privilege to take people who are living down at the bottom of this pyramid and help them join us up at the top. It’s not hard. It just takes dedication and a willingness to look beyond ourselves. We can be more, and we can be better, if we do it together.”

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Randy Rowland, Seattle Seahawks announcer

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