

**NYCHA CHAIRMAN JOHN B. RHEA
ARBOR DAY 2011 CELEBRATION
THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 2011 – 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR COMMUNITY CENTER, 1000 ROSEDALE AVENUE, BRONX, NY**

Good morning, everyone; and thank you, Sam Champion, for that gracious introduction and for being with us on this very special occasion.

To NYCHA’s residents who are with us this morning; our colleagues, and our many partners who believe as we do that supporting public housing communities is central to ensuring New York City’s health and prosperity—thank you.

I want to thank Commissioner Margarita López for her tireless leadership as NYCHA’s Environmental Coordinator and, as importantly, for her partnership in supporting New York City’s most precious resource: our youth. For it is our children who we truly honor on this—and every—Arbor Day. As the Native American proverb reminds us: “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

At NYCHA, we are working not only to ensure that the New York we entrust to our children is more sustainable, more livable and

more green, but also that NYCHA families are co-owners of this urgent and unrivaled responsibility.

I am thrilled that so many of our youth could join us today and lend their hands to the larger service of protecting and nurturing our environment. To my young friends from PS 111 Seton Falls; PS 107; PS 9; PS108 Captain Vincent G. Fowler; and PS 90 Edna Cohen School, whose motto is “Where the Wonderful Happens Because of You!”—Welcome. The “wonderful” is truly happening here at Justice Sonia Sotomayor Houses because of each of you, and because of all of our children.

I want to thank a true friend to the families of New York City—the legendary Bette Midler. When Bette founded the New York Restoration Project in 1995, she began with her one-of-a-kind heart, her vision to create a better, more vibrant New York City and her passion for bringing people and communities together. More than fifteen years later, Bette and the NYRP in partnership with the City and particularly our friend Commissioner Adrian Benepe, have rescued countless parks and community gardens in

underserved neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs.

Today, NYCHA is proud to stand with Bette, the New York Restoration Project, Commissioner Benepe and the Department of Parks and Recreation as we dig and shovel our way toward achieving the inspirational goal—set forth in Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s PlaNYC—of one million trees planted and cared for throughout the City by the year 2017.

At NYCHA, we believe deeply in the transformative power of caring for our communities’ green spaces. This will be our 49th year recognizing our great gardeners, celebrating our shared responsibility to create greener NYCHA neighborhoods, and preparing our youth to carry on this tradition. I want to thank NYCHA’s Assistant Deputy General Manager for Community Operations Deidra Gilliard; our Garden and Greening Program Manager Lee Trotman; and all the dedicated men and women of Community Operations and the Department of Citywide Programs and Assessments who keep NYCHA’s gardens growing.

Finally, to Larry Sobin of BNP Paribas and Pat Pineda of Toyota North America—thank you for standing with us to strengthen our communities for future generations. Your energy and your resolve are inspiring and invaluable.

Today, together, we are helping to raise a generation which will not leave their hillsides and community spaces treeless; a generation which will honor the gifts that nature so freely gives to us all; and a generation which will work to improve our city and our nation with the beauty and the bounty that only nature can provide.

On behalf of the families of Justice Sotomayor Houses and every NYCHA family—thank you.