

Hand-up, not Handout

Thad Moore (74) leads a humanitarian organization that helps those in need help themselves.

By Kim McGrath

Ever wonder what it's like to get up in the morning and know that your job will be to provide a home to a single mom, create jobs by providing financial support to a local small business venture, or revitalize a downtown community? Thad Moore (74) can tell you. He's been doing it for more than 25 years with the Center for Community Self-Help in Durham, NC.

"Thad has been the heart and soul of Self-Help for many, many years," says the organization's CEO, Martin Eakes. Moore and Eakes found common ground in the early '80s. Both wanted to level the playing field for displaced workers and champion the cause of those most often overlooked. Moore had been advocating for employees of textile factories in North Carolina interested in worker-buyout, but his desire to champion the underdog began while studying at Wake Forest where he organized a local public interest research group to advocate for cotton textile workers affected by brown lung disease. Joining Eakes and Self-Help fit Moore's humanitarian nature.

Rod Webb (92), senior vice president at Crescent State Bank and president of the Wake Forest alumni association has, as a former Self-Help board member, seen first-hand Moore's commitment to giving a hand-up and not merely a handout. "He gives," says Webb. "He strives to make the world better for all people, not in theory and rhetoric but in personal sacrifice and action. He has committed his life, sacrificing time for himself and with his family, money and recognition to be a part of something bigger than himself."

Self-Help has several programs under one roof—all designed to advocate and support women, people of color, rural residents, veterans and low-wealth families. The Center for Community Self-Help develops and coordinates Self-Help's programs, raises resources and advocates for economic opportunity. The Self-Help Credit Union is a federally insured credit union that uses deposits from members to make commercial and home loans. The Ventures Fund concentrates its lending on unconventional business loans and is funded with loans and grants. The Center for Responsible Lending focuses on eliminating abusive financial practices. Since its founding in 1980, Self-Help has provided \$5 billion to finance more than 55,000 homeowners, small businesses and nonprofits. The organization operates with the belief that owning assets, such as a home, enables a family to send a child to college, start a business or weather a financial crisis.

Those who work at Self-Help join the organization for the mission, not the money. A salary cap allows for earnings to be shared more equitably. Jamie Miyares (98, MBA '05) joined Self-Help in 2007 and is a marketing director. "A lot of my classmates thought I was nuts because I was going to work for an organization with a salary cap. But I'm energized when I get up in the morning, because I'm helping the underserved."

"I'm infinitely proud of the people who work here, because they could earn more somewhere else," says Moore. "They choose to work for less, because they believe in what we do."

Growing up in the small town of Madison, NC, Moore was a first-generation college graduate whose father was a car dealer and grandparents were farmers. It is evident through his words and actions that Moore is grateful for his opportunities and he credits Wake Forest with providing him knowledge, support and resources to support his work helping others, and his ability to adapt and learn new skills.

"Thad has mastered more different jobs than anyone I know. He started as a community organizer, became a managerial coach for small businesses, ran the accounting and operations of the Self-Help Credit Union, and then became its president," says Eakes.

"Thad is inspiring. His versatility is amazing. His ability to keep on keeping on is quite remarkable," adds director of policy David Beck, a 10-year veteran at Self-Help.

Beck says the growth he has seen in Self-Help since he arrived in 1998 proves the organization and its leadership are doing something right. "Ten years ago, there were 80 employees in five North Carolina offices. Now we have 250 people across the state and a building in D.C."

Asked where he sees Self-Help headed in the future, Moore says it is moving toward real estate development—buying downtown buildings, often in distressed communities—and renovating them with the intent to resell them to residents.

Now in a trouble-shooting role as vice president of special projects, there's no indication that things will slow down for Moore. But that's likely a good thing for a man who says his advocacy work with Self-Help has been "all I could ever ask for."

To learn more about Self-Help, visit www.self-help.org.

