

WHY WE'RE BLESSED TO BE LIVING IN THE USA--AN ENGINEER'S PERSPECTIVE

If you actually take the time to read this newsletter, you might be wondering what is going on. After all, I am sitting down to write the August issue and the calendar says it is December 1, 2009. I have to apologize for my tardiness with the last part of the year's installments, and at the same time give an explanation.

I have been busy (haven't we all), but more importantly--I have been nervous about what would come out of the keyboard when I sat down to write these articles. This newsletter really isn't supposed to be a political statement piece, or an editorial commentary on our society. I was a little nervous that I would be unable to stay off those topics and just talk about something that has to do with our profession. Additionally, the economy and other factors have made me a little depressed in these last few months, and that is a bad place to be when you need to write an article for a newsletter.

In any event, some of my early childhood training came into play recently and I began counting my blessings instead

of looking at all the negatives around me. I think we have all been told to count our blessings to gain a little perspective--which will usually end up raising your spirits and end a depressing mood.

So, we are going to spend the next four articles looking at one engineer's perspective on the engineering marvels that make us so blessed to be living in these United States of America.

This article will take a look at our housing situation.

HOUSING IN THE USA

If you live in the United States, there is a chance that you are homeless. Approximately 0.22% of our population is homeless, and that is a statistic that we should try to reduce as much as possible. However, if you don't live in the United States, you are about 7 times more likely to be homeless. Approximately 1.5% of the world's population is classified as homeless. (Taken from a variety of internet sites.)

(The side note to these statistics is that a person living in Africa in a mud hut would probably be classified as living in a

house, while that same mud hut in the USA could end up getting you classified as homeless.)

Aside from the fact that we have housed the greatest (or near the greatest) percentage of our population of any developed nation in the world, we have also done it in style.

Nationally, we have an average new home size of more than 2,400 sq feet--a number that has been steadily (and recently very quickly) expanding for over 100 years.

Couple that with the fact that we are putting fewer people in our larger homes (we have dropped from over 4.5 people per home



Biltmore Estate



BLESSED IN THE USA...CONT.

Rio Slums

to less than 2.5 people per home in the same 100 year time frame) and you will conclude that the average American has a lot more elbow room than they used to have.

UPSCALE HOUSING

We really go overboard at times with our houses, too. I took a quick look at some crazy-big and crazy-expensive homes online, and here are a couple interesting ones I found for your review:

How about this little gem, the Biltmore Mansion. This cozy little home was constructed by George Washington Vanderbilt (II) and finished in 1895. It has about 175,000 sq feet of living space, over 250 rooms, and 65 fireplaces. Perfect for entertaining guests during the Holidays. This building is currently a tourist attraction, with guided tours and even overnight stays possible. If you decide to stay overnight, you might want to take your GPS with you so you don't get lost going to the bathroom!

If that one is maybe a little too large for you, I found another one that was actually on the market a couple years ago. This home was listed at \$150 Million, making it the most expensive home ever listed in the United States. Aaron Spelling's widow listed the property, planning to downsize to a little \$47 Million condo. This home only has about 56,500 sq feet, but still contains several nice amenities--including a barber shop on the top floor. It is also still large enough to entertain, with parking for about 100 cars along the winding motor court entrance. After that brief review of some of the more lavish homes, how about taking a look at the other end of the spectrum?

"THE PROJECTS"

Not everyone lives in a multi-million dollar home, of course. Some of the residents of the USA live in Public Housing, frequently referred to as, "The Projects."

Perhaps the most infamous single Project area in the United States was the Cabrini-Green housing complex in Chicago. Built with tax money in an effort to provide housing for America's poorer inhabitants, Cabrini-Green became synonymous with crime and unsafe living conditions. The Chicago



Sierra-Leone Slums

Housing Authority has since begun (and maybe finished by now) the destruction of this complex, replacing it with a new model of public housing, interspersing subsidized housing with full income housing.

You may not know, however, that most major metropolitan areas in the USA have similar housing projects built and subsidized by tax dollars. In New York City, for example, there are approximately 400,000 people living in about 174,000 apartments. After checking this out online I discovered that the rent is set at 30% of your Adjusted Gross Income, and that you don't have to be a citizen of the United States to qualify for an apartment. If you are single and have an AGI of less than \$43,000 per year (family groups also qualify with higher incomes), you can qualify to get a subsidized apartment in New York City.

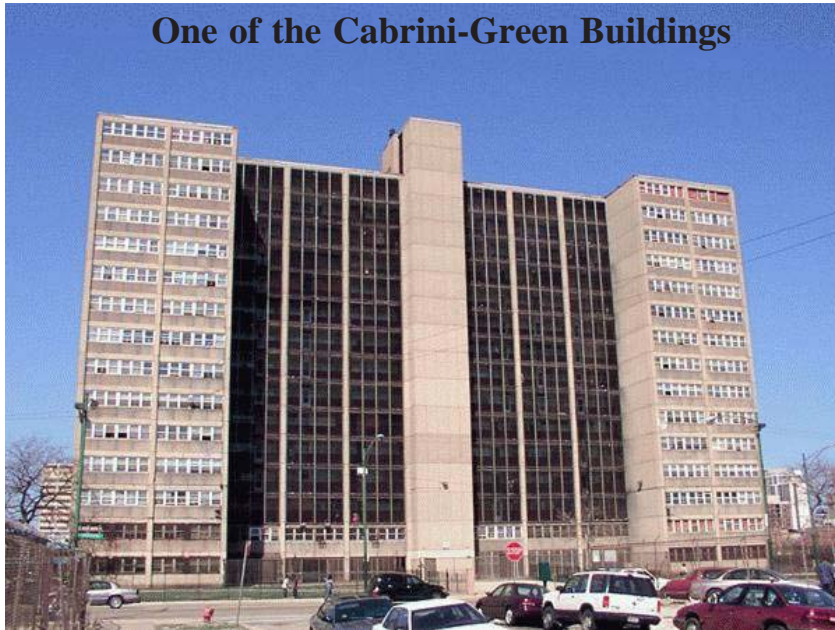
Why would I be proud of Cabrini-Green, or the Housing Authority in New York? Well, check out these pictures of the slums in Rio, or Sierra Leone.

Cabrini-Green doesn't look too bad now, does it?

It's always better to be thankful for what you have, rather than upset about what someone else has, isn't it?

Next issue will be about our transportation system.

One of the Cabrini-Green Buildings



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