

**NYCHA CHAIRMAN JOHN B. RHEA  
YEAR UP NEW YORK CLASS 8 GRADUATION  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2011 – 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM  
CIPRIANI WALL STREET, 55 WALL STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10005**

Good morning, Year Up. Thank you, Gerald, for that very warm introduction. To the Year Up New York Local Board and to the entire Year Up family—thank you for this honor. I accept it on behalf of the nearly 12,000 men and women at NYCHA who dedicate their careers to serving the families of public housing in our great city. This honor serves as a reminder of how deeply connected we all are; as a testament to how much our success depends on the commitment of others; and as an encouragement for the work that lies ahead. And as we all know, there is much work ahead of us!

I am proud to share the stage this morning with my fellow honoree, Bill Neuenfeldt. Over my career, I have worked with Bain & Company many times and I have tremendous respect for the work Bill and his colleagues perform on behalf of their clients. Most importantly: to the graduating class, congratulations. Thank you for allowing me to share in this very special occasion. I

believe deeply in the work Year Up does, day after day, to build a better America by helping young men and women become your best selves and, ultimately, share your gifts with the world.

I am especially proud of our NYCHA residents. If there were only three or four of today's graduates who were NYCHA residents, I would congratulate you by name. But as is usually the case—when NYCHA shows up, we show up in force. 10 of the Class 8 graduates are NYCHA residents. To you and to your families, thank you for representing us so well. I truly look forward to all the great things each of you will do in the days and years ahead. You may not always hear the words “youth,” or “young adults” when our political and business leaders—and even your parents—speak; but know that you are always part of the conversation. When Mayor Bloomberg proclaims that New York City will lead the nation's “Green Revolution” by fostering tomorrow's energy economy—he is talking about the young people in this room. When President Obama talks of “Winning the Future” by

advancing opportunity and spurring innovation, as he did recently in his State of the Union address—he, too, is speaking of you.

And so, when I look around and see so many talented, driven and determined young men and women, I am reminded of another community organizer—César Chávez, who famously said, “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others—for their sakes and for our own.”

Ensuring America’s prosperity tomorrow, demands empowering your generation today. Gerald and Year Up have boldly and bravely embraced that challenge. By bridging the opportunity divide, Year Up is fostering a more competitive New York City and a more viable, vibrant nation for all of us. It’s just one of the many reasons the New York City Housing Authority is not only fortunate, but also proud to partner with Year Up as we embrace the empowerment challenge with them.

Embracing new challenges, of course, requires that we draw on past experiences. Growing up, I was encouraged by my parents to always seek an opportunity to become involved in the community—and if I couldn't find an opportunity to give back, then I should create one. So from a young age, I witnessed the power of mentorship to change the trajectory of a person's life. And I certainly would not be standing here today if it were not for the important role mentors played in my own life.

As a high school student, some of my most rewarding days were spent as a mentor to young boys in foster homes. And after graduate school, I became a mentor and tutor to an eight-year-old boy who lived in Chicago's infamous Cabrini-Green public housing development. Like all of us, I carry my experiences with me and they inform the principles that guide my work. At NYCHA, we believe the long-term prosperity of not only public housing communities, but all of New York City depends on empowering NYCHA families.

In 2009, shortly after becoming NYCHA's chairman, I created the Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability and charged the department to develop programs and partnerships that would increase our residents' economic opportunities in three broad areas: workforce training and job placement; financial literacy and empowerment; and resident based entrepreneurship.

Today, I can proudly say that nearly 50 percent of NYCHA families are working families. That number is growing...and we're working to accelerate that growth. Just last December, we graduated two classes from our Resident Training Academy, a joint venture with the Robin Hood Foundation that prepares residents for jobs with construction contractors and as development Caretakers. We are creating new workforce training and financial literacy programs at our Community Centers that, taken together, serve more than 150,000 residents and members of their surrounding communities. And we're recruiting residents

and making sure they gain the skills to assist in the modernization and rehabilitation of NYCHA's buildings and apartments.

NYCHA is committed, more than at any time in our history, to engaging our residents, tapping their full potential and, ultimately, connecting public housing neighborhoods to surrounding communities and regional economies in ways that make both local and regional economic growth sustainable and equitable over the long term.

That work begins one family and one person at a time. As former South African President Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Year Up is truly changing the world through the power of education.

I want to leave you with the words of another hero of mine: Dr. Maya Angelou. When asked by a student for her advice on how to live a successful life Dr. Angelou paused, as she so often does, and finally said: "You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead

pursue the things you love and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off of you." We are all watching you, cheering you on and hoping for your every success. I hope that you will remember Dr. Angelou's words, that you will pursue the things you love, and that, through following your passion, you will truly change the world.

Thank you, again, for this honor, and congratulations.