

New Page in Social Entrepreneurship

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The nonprofit Project Home Again has built 45 new homes in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. Despite this, Len Riggio, who founded and funded Project Home Again, is loath to be pigeonholed as a social entrepreneur. He spoke alongside Tulane President Scott Cowen on Wednesday (April 14) for the NewDay Social Entrepreneurship speaker series.



Len Riggio, chair of Barnes and Noble, founded Project Home Again that has built 45 new homes in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. (Photo from Barnes and Noble)

"I don't fall into the mold," said Riggio, the chair of Barnes and Noble, who spoke in the Qatar Ballroom of the Lavin-Bernick Center for the final installment of the [speaker series](#) for this academic year.

Primarily a businessman, Riggio spoke of his early retail aspirations. "I had a vision to make a living and to make enough money to have my father retire from being a cab driver," he said.

Having exceeded those aspirations, the chair of the largest bookseller in the world has devoted himself to a number of philanthropic initiatives, including service on nearly two dozen not-for-profit boards.

In 2008, Riggio founded Project Home Again, which has plans to build 55 more houses by 2011. Most of the constructed houses are occupied. Families who apply to live in one of the Gentilly neighborhood homes must have lived in New Orleans before the storm and fall below a certain income level.

"I decided that we would, in effect, become the insurers of last resort," he said.

Cowen credited Project Home Again with building more single-family homes in New Orleans than any other organization since the storm.

Riggio is an example of how a successful businessperson can be a successful social entrepreneur, Cowen added. "[Riggio] did extraordinarily well in the for-profit sector and he used those same skills and applied them to a very important societal problem," he said.

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