

Two regional manufacturers contribute to *First Homes*

Rochester, Minn. - The Rochester Area Foundation today announced that two area manufacturers have made significant contributions to *First Homes*, a public-private partnership to build starter homes in Rochester and surrounding communities.

Strongwell, a manufacturer of fiberglass products, is contributing \$25,000. About 200 people work at its Chatfield location.

Valley Design, a custom powder coater and furniture component manufacturer, is contributing \$10,000. Valley Design employs about 135 people at its facility in Fountain.

These two contributions mark the first major gifts to *First Homes* from businesses outside of Rochester.

First Homes, an initiative of Rochester Area Foundation and Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, is working with local developers to build 875 starter homes and rental townhomes in the region in the next five years. In 2000-2001, 158 starter homes or rental townhomes will be built in communities surrounding Rochester and 272 homes will be constructed in Rochester.

Both contributing businesses have found it difficult to recruit employees because of the housing shortage in their communities.

Jeff Tickle, general manager of Strongwell, says he sees a direct relationship between his company's worker shortage and the area housing shortage. "We wanted to do our part to be a good corporate citizen and address the need for housing."

Tim Bremseth, CEO of Valley Design, says his company is doing everything possible to recruit – but employees don't want to sign on if there's nowhere nearby to live. "We were very encouraged when we heard about *First Homes* because it is addressing the housing shortage throughout the region," says Bremseth.

"I would encourage other manufacturers to support it as well because more homes are needed, especially in the rural areas," he says.

First Homes is working to raise \$12.75 million locally; so far xxx million has been raised. Every dollar contributed locally is matched by \$9 from other private and public sources.

First Homes home-buying assistance is available for households that make at least \$22,000. Income requirements are less for rental townhomes. For more information, potential homebuyers can call *First Homes* Center at 507-287-7117 or check on the web at www.FirstHomes.org.

Individuals or businesses interested in making a contributing can call the Rochester Area Foundation at 507-282-0203.