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NEWS RELEASE

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First Homes to receive statewide housing award

First Homes will receive one of six prestigious statewide housing awards from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency.

The Excellence in Affordable Housing Initiatives Award will be presented Friday, Nov. 8, at a luncheon ceremony hosted by MHFA at Landmark Center in St. Paul.

MHFA presents the annual Partners in Affordable Housing Awards to celebrate exceptional contributions of organizations and individuals toward advancing affordable housing in Minnesota. The awards have been presented for seven years.

“This award demonstrates the effect First Homes has had in providing starter homes for working families in the greater Rochester area,” Sean Allen, First Homes executive director, said. “While the recognition by peers in affordable housing initiatives helps tell our story, we continue forward in our mission to ensure there is an adequate stock of starter homes for employees in a 30-mile radius of Rochester.”

The award to be presented to First Homes recognizes an outstanding initiative by an individual, organization or partnership in lending or education.

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First Homes is well on its way to meeting its stated goals in providing starter homes for working families in the greater Rochester area.

As one of the state's fastest growing areas, Rochester hosts international industry and one of the nation's top medical facilities. In addition, the city and surrounding areas in Olmsted County and surrounding counties have experienced a housing crunch for decades.

In the fall of 1999, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund worked to design a program to finance and build at least 875 starter homes in 15 cities in the Rochester area over a five-year period. The plan was embraced by the Rochester Area Foundation and Mayo Clinic, which kicked in the initial \$1 million and \$4 million respectively.

Since the program got under way in 2000, more than 200 single-family homes have been purchased through the First Homes program and almost 200 rental units have been built for working families – in a total of 10 communities to date.

The Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce nominated First Homes for the prestigious statewide award.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors has been responsible for First Homes' success. After the initial leadership gifts from the Rochester Area Foundation and Mayo Clinic, more than \$12 million in pledges have been received from community residents, businesses and organizations.

With community firmly behind the project, First Homes has been able to realize major investments from state, federal and private charitable sources. The Greater Minnesota Housing Fund and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency have partnered with First Homes in offering guidance and experience.

Local governments have played an important role in First Homes' success, too.

“The leadership of public officials in Rochester and surrounding communities has been the key to leveraging additional community resources in tax increment financing and other incentives,” Steve Thornton, executive director of the Rochester Area Foundation, said.

Builders and lenders have been instrumental in integrating First Homes into the community, too.

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To date, First Homes has provided more than \$1.9 million in financial assistance.

The award will be accepted in St. Paul by Sean Allen, First Homes executive director, Cheryl Richardson, First Homes program officer, and Karel Weigel, First Homes board chair. MHFA Commissioner Katherine G. Hadley will present the award with State Auditor Judi Dutcher, an MHFA board member.

Additional awards to be presented by MHFA at the luncheon are to: Dakota County Community Development Agency, Excellence in Ownership/Management of Affordable Housing Award; Great River Interfaith Partnership Assembly of Isaiah, Steve Chadwick/Fran Skinner Leadership and Service Award; Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership and the City of St. Peter for its Nicollet Meadows development, Pauline Carlson Award for Excellence in Development; George Howell, Mankato Housing and Economic Development, Mary Stuber Award for Outstanding Public Service; and Sherman Associates' Guardian Angels development in Hastings, Excellence in Housing Design Award.

First Homes single-family homes and rental units have been built in Byron, Dover, Grand Meadow, Hayfield, Kasson, Pine Island, Plainview, Rochester, Spring Valley and Zumbrota.

A \$12.75 million fund-raising effort by the Rochester Area Foundation is seeking donations from area employers, individuals and organizations. The raised funds can be leveraged for additional funding of \$115 million from other sources, and the total, \$128 million, is the amount needed to build starter homes for 875 families in a 30-mile radius of Rochester.

To date, the Rochester Area Foundation has raised \$12.27 million for the First Homes project. Donations may be made by calling (507) 282-0203.

For more information on First Homes, call (507) 287-7117 or visit <http://www.FirstHomes.org> on the Web.