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FOUR SAN DIEGO YOUTH ADVANCE TO NATIONALS IN ‘WHAT HOME MEANS TO ME’ ESSAY CONTEST

SAN DIEGO, CA – Four San Diego youths have been selected by the Southern California Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) as regional winners in the national NAHRO “What Home Means to Me” poster contest. The winners advance to nationals and compete with other state and regional winners for U.S. Savings Bonds and the grand prize, an all expenses-paid trip for the honoree and his or her family to Washington, D.C..

Mayor Jerry Sanders and Councilmember Todd Gloria will recognize the four San Diego winners -- 7-year old Benjamin Rios, 13-year old Lizette Barajas, 7-year old Antonice Akbar, and 14-year old Sonya Ashley Campos -- along with other local participants in the contest on Tuesday, Oct. 25 at 10 a.m. in City Council chambers.

“When families have affordable, stable housing, the children in those homes are able to focus on their education and the future,” said Janice Weinrick, Deputy Executive Director of the San Diego Redevelopment Agency. “We are delighted that Benjamin, Lizette and their families are enjoying life in homes developed with the assistance of our redevelopment team.”

Both Barajas and Rios call 16th & Market, in downtown San Diego, their home. The 12-story development offers a safe and stable living environment for families making between 30 percent and 60 percent of the area median income.

“Home” to Lizette is a place where she can spend quality time with her family, but when she needs a place to relax, she can go to her room and relish the peace. “My home is the best thing I have,” Lizette wrote in her essay.

For Benji, who is physically disabled, his high-rise home affords him mobility. He is a quick elevator ride to the computer room or the rooftop garden and playground. Benji titled his essay, “Closer to Heaven.” He writes, “When I sit in the patio with my mom, I look up and can almost reach the stars.”

Regional winners 7-year old Antonice and 14-year old Sonya Ashley live in apartments for low-income families that are owned by the San Diego Housing Commission.

“My home inspires me to keep moving forward and pursuing my goals in life,” wrote 14-year old Sonya Ashley who loves math and hopes to be a pediatrician when she grows up.

And 7-year old Antonice who lives with her mom and brother says the best thing about her home is that “it’s peaceful” and there’s “lots of love.”

“What a good feeling it is to know that these children feel loved and have a sense of security in their homes,” said Richard C. Gentry, President & CEO of the San Diego Housing Commission, and former President of NAHRO. “Congratulations to our four local winners, and we wish them luck in the national competition.”

Background

Each year, NAHRO holds a poster contest for children residing in affordable housing and community development owned or administered by NAHRO member agencies. Posters reflect the national theme, “What Home Means to Me.” National honorees are selected from chapter/state-level winning entries and are recognized at NAHRO’s March 2012 National Legislative Conference in Washington, DC. From the 161 entries, NAHRO selected nine winners to advance to nationals; four of the winners are from San Diego!

About the San Diego Housing Commission

The San Diego Housing Commission is a public agency working to expand affordable housing opportunities in the City of San Diego. Each year, the agency helps 125,000 low-income families and individuals with affordable housing through award-winning programs that benefit the city's economy and revitalize neighborhoods. For more information, visit: <http://www.sdhc.net/>

About the City of San Diego Redevelopment Agency

The City of San Diego Redevelopment Agency, created by the City Council in 1958, uses special legal and financial mechanisms to eliminate blight and improve economic and physical conditions in designated areas of the City. The Agency's purview encompasses 14 project areas, study areas and affordable housing. Activities within the project areas are carried out by the city's Redevelopment Department and two public, nonprofit city corporations: Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC) and Southeastern Economic Development Corporation (SEDC). The Agency also administers seven Project Area Committees (PAC) that advise the agency on the adoption of redevelopment plans and implementing redevelopment projects. For more information, visit: www.sandiego.gov/redevelopment-agency/

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What Home Means to Me

"My name is Benji. I love my new house because it's easier to go places and do things on my own, like going up and down on the elevator to computer room, playground, activity room and garden. When I sit in the patio with my mom I look up and can almost touch the stars. Thank you for my new house. I feel closer to heaven where God lives.

Love Benji.

P.S. I forgot to mention I like my bathroom, my own bathroom I can get in the tub with no help!"

What Home Means To Me

"My home to me is where I get to spend time with my family and we have a good time together. It is also where I get to relax in my room and have peace all around me. I am very lucky to be living in a place like this, I am really thankful. Every time I am home I get full with joy. I thank God every day to be living in such a wonderful place and Father Joe for making these affordable apartments."

Lizette Barajas

