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Housing Authority of Chelan County and the City of Wenatchee

Honored with Friend of Housing Award

Spokane, Wash.—September 30, 2009—The Housing Authority of Chelan County and the City of Wenatchee were honored last night for their outstanding service in expanding affordable housing resources for the benefit of Washington’s low-income residents.

Before an audience of 350 colleagues, the Authority’s Executive Director Alicia McRae accepted the *Friend of Housing* Organizational Achievement Award presented annually by the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. The awards ceremony took place on Sept. 29 at the Doubletree Hotel Spokane City Center as part of the 2009 *Housing Washington* conference.

“The authority patiently built community support and persevered through significant opposition to become the state's leading provider of community-based seasonal-occupancy housing for farm workers,” said Brien Thane of the Washington State Farmworker Housing Trust. “They are a team worthy of special recognition and I’m delighted they have the receive this important award.

In 2002, the housing authority completed development of Heritage Glen in East Wenatchee, an innovative farmworker housing project that combines both seasonal and year-round units in a single community. This was the organization’s first venture into this type of development.

After seeing its success, community members encouraged to development of similar housing for workers travelling to North Central Washington for the harvest season. The result was Vista Del Rio, a 24-unit seasonal-occupancy development made

possible through the assistance of USDA Rural Development and the Housing Trust Fund. Another property was Bello Rio, which provides 26 units of year-round housing built next door to Vista Del Rio with Low Income Housing Tax Credits and Housing Trust Fund dollars. Both properties received Douglas County 2060 funds.

After building permits were received for these two properties, neighbors filed lawsuits to stop the projects. Concurrently, many people rallied to support the authority, including a local advocacy group called Just Housing, Columbia Legal Services, The Washington Growers Clearinghouse, social service providers and local growers.

While defending Vista del Rio and Bello Rio, the authority continued in its mission and developed plans for more seasonal-occupancy housing in the nearby community of Malaga. In partnership with the Washington Growers League, the Columbia Pointe development and Sage Bluff, the Growers League's neighboring seasonal-occupancy development, opened their doors to workers last Spring. Columbia Pointe, alone, offers 24 housing units for up to 128 agricultural workers.

Ultimately, the authority prevailed in both lawsuits, permitting Bello Rio to open in 2008 and Vista del Rio, finally, in the Spring of 2009, just in time for the cherry harvest.

Consequently, the authority has a total of 66 apartments serving up to 366 workers and their family members. By providing essential housing for farmworkers who would otherwise have no place to stay, they helped local growers meet their labor needs during peak harvest season and reduce health and safety risks to the community.

Other achievements also solidified the Commission's decision to recognize the authority. They were the first nonprofit organization to use tax credits for seasonal housing and to receive USDA rental assistance for seasonal households. Moreover, they partnered with the NW Justice Project to help relocate low-income families from manufactured housing parks that were being closed. They continue to work with community groups and ad hoc committees of stakeholders to address other housing issues.

The Commission, based in Seattle, presented a total of five *Friend of Housing* awards to two individuals and three organizations. Honorees were selected for their

leadership and exceptional contribution to creating or supporting affordable housing, implementing housing-related programs, creating innovative financing mechanisms for housing, supporting homebuyer education or technical training efforts within the housing community, and helping to solve housing problems.

Washington State Housing Finance Commission is a publicly accountable, self-supporting agency dedicated to increasing housing access and affordability and to expanding the availability of quality community services for Washington state residents.

Information on the other award recipients is available at www.wshfc.org.

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