



SAN DIEGO
HOUSING
COMMISSION

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“WHAT HOME MEANS TO ME” POSTER AND ESSAY CONTEST COMMEMORATES HOUSING AMERICA MONTH

Interim Mayor Todd Gloria and City Councilmember Lorie Zapf recognize children helped by SDHC’s federal rental assistance and affordable housing

SAN DIEGO, CA—Happiness, safety, love and family were common themes among the [children’s posters and essays](#) on display at San Diego City Hall today as the winners of the San Diego Housing Commission’s (SDHC) “What Home Means to Me” poster and essay contest were announced, along with a declaration of October 2013 as “Housing America Month.”

SDHC’s “What Home Means to Me” poster and essay contest encouraged children living in SDHC-owned affordable housing developments or whose families receive federal rental assistance from SDHC to share their thoughts about what having their own home means to them.

The three winners in SDHC’s poster and essay contest represent the 13,352 children, younger than 18 years of age, whose families receive federal rental assistance from SDHC.

“There’s a lot of love in there,” said 12-year-old Ashley Castenada, reading from her winning essay in the 6th grade through 8th grade category, during a news conference at City Hall today. “The house is warm because whenever we need a shoulder to cry on, we will always be there for you.”

In addition to Castenada, Interim Mayor Todd Gloria announced two other winners:

- In the Kindergarten through 5th grade category: 8-year-old Kayla Rico.
- In the 9th grade through 12th grade category: 19-year-old Bishara Auli, who attends college now.

“Thank you to San Diego Housing Commission President and CEO Rick Gentry and his team at the San Diego Housing Commission for creating this opportunity to underline why housing is important in our community, and to give some recognition to some really extraordinary young people who are here today,” Gloria said during the news conference.

Contest participants also represented approximately 1,300 children, younger than 18, who live with their families in affordable apartments at 160 properties owned by SDHC.

“And, as you can see, it is vitally important for every community in the nation to preserve and create affordable housing for our families,” said City Councilmember Lorie Zapf, chair of the City Council’s Land Use and Housing Committee.

Mary Helen Parra, 36, the mother to two sons, 7-year-old Raymundo and 3-year-old Francisco, who participated in the poster and essay contest, said at the news conference that having an affordable place to live that she rents from SDHC allows her to be independent.

“I’m a single mom with two kids and two jobs,” Parra said. “What the San Diego Housing Commission means to me and my kids is that “It allows me to feed my kids, dress them. It means a lot to me, and it’s a home for my kids.”

With a group of San Diego State University (SDSU) cheerleaders standing behind him to cheer on the children who participated in SDHC’s poster and essay contest, SDHC Commissioner Ben Moraga, SDSU’s Sr. Director of Corporate, Foundation and Community Relations, announced special prizes for the contest participants.

“Through the generous donation of San Diego State University and on behalf of our president, we have 61 tickets here for the entire families of these children to enjoy an Aztec game on November 2 against New Mexico,” Moraga said. “We also have Aztec T-shirts, in hopes that they will wear these to the game and cheer on the Aztecs, and hopefully one day become an Aztec.”

Taco Bell also donated coupons for a free Taco Bell Combo Meal for each of the children and their families.

In addition, the three contest winners each received a \$25 gift card.

“These children represent an investment in our future,” Gentry said. “The San Diego Housing Commission is proud to be a part of that.”

All of the children’s artwork and essays are featured on SDHC’s website, www.sdhc.org.

At the San Diego City Council today, Gentry was presented with a proclamation declaring October 2013 to be “Housing America Month” in the City of San Diego, and the contest participants and their families were recognized.

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