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Federal initiative helps Washoe County first-time homebuyers

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Middle-income families in Washoe County will be able to become first-time homeowners through a program operated by agencies including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Reno Housing Authority.

Federal and local housing and elected officials gathered Friday in front of a home on Oppio Street in Sparks that will be renovated and sold to a family through HUD's Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

The news conference was held as officials announced the Washoe County Consortium received more than \$4.2 million through the federal Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. The funds will be used to purchase foreclosed homes in what officials call "targeted neighborhoods" that threatened neighborhood stabilization and to rehabilitate them for new owners and/or renters.

Beginning in April 2009, the consortium, through the Reno Housing Authority, has purchased 12 homes in Sparks. The authority has also bought an additional four homes in Sun Valley and 13 homes in Stead.

"With the foreclosure crisis, especially in Nevada, the program was established to help local communities to keep neighborhoods from sliding into decline and rehabilitate homes for sale or rentals," said Tony Ramirez, the Reno HUD field officer.

Neighborhoods were identified by local officials, and those with high foreclosure rates were targeted for the HUD program, Ramirez said.

Besides the initial \$4 million county housing agencies received for the program, another \$20.9 million in funding was made available.

Consuelo Westreicher and her family now own a home in north Reno and are among the first families to benefit from the neighborhood stabilization program.

"The (housing authority) helped my family; we owe them for helping us own a home," Westreicher said. "We wouldn't have been able to do it otherwise."

Westreicher, a housekeeping supervisor at the Grand Sierra Resort, her husband Andrik and the couple's three children moved into a home this past August. Prior to that, the Westreichers had rented a home through the Reno Housing Authority.

To qualify for the HUD program, the couple had to show proof of income and make a down payment on the new home.

HUD Deputy Secretary Ron Sims praised the Reno Housing Authority and the Nevada Rural Housing Authority for coming together to make a strong case for the federal funding grant.

"Another good thing is that jobs are generated because labor is involved in renovating these homes," Sims said.

"It's good seeing money spent well that helps people."
