



**For Immediate Release  
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### **Media Advisory**

## **THREE COUNTY RESIDENTS WIN CASH AWARDS FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY**

The 17<sup>th</sup> annual Affordable Housing Summit includes an awards ceremony to award \$25,000 to three first-time homeowners in the annual “Break the Barrier to Home Ownership” Contest.

North Bethesda, MD – A public school bus driver, a Rockville city employee and a dedicated quality control worker have been chosen as winners in the “Break the Barrier to Home Ownership” contest. The contest is an annual competition sponsored by the Affordable Housing Conference of Montgomery County. The three winners will receive a total of \$25,000 to help them purchase their first home in Montgomery County.

The awards will be formally announced at the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Affordable Housing Conference which will be held on Friday, April 4, 2008 from 8a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Bethesda North Marriott Conference Center, 5701 Marinelli Road, North Bethesda.

The award winners are: Vitaliy Blokha who won the \$10,000 first prize; Cynthia Bangali and Nelly Pinedo who each won \$7,500 prizes. The money will help each family with closing costs when they purchase their new homes.

The \$10,000 first prize is being sponsored by Aris Mardirossian; one \$7,500 award is sponsored by PNC Bank and one \$7,500 award is being sponsored by Norman Dreyfuss of IDI Group Companies and co-chair of the Affordable Housing Conference.

The cash awards are given annually to the winners of an essay contest sponsored by the Affordable Housing Conference to help Montgomery County residents afford their first home. The “Break the Barrier to Home Ownership” contest asks each applicant to state in 200 words or less what home ownership means to them.

More than 120 people applied for the award this year. The winning essays are chosen by members of the Affordable Housing Conference planning committee.

Included below are brief bios of each winner and excerpts of their winning essays:

**Vitaliy Blokha:** Mr. Blokha is a quality control administrator at Neuro Probe, Inc. in Gaithersburg. He is an immigrant from Russia and has been a renter his whole life. He is deeply appreciative of the financial assistance to help him finally purchase a home. He said he intends to be a good role model and very involved in his new community.

“For me, positive aspects of homeownership in my new country include social, financial and emotional components. Homeownership is a symbol that I have achieved a certain status and gives me a sense of stability and security.”

**Cynthia Bangali:** Ms. Bangali has one daughter, age 10. She works for the City of Rockville as a Program Coordinator. She moved here from Washington State two years ago to be closer to family members and is excited to buy her first home in Montgomery County.

“Homeownership is about so many things and responsibility is one of them. It is about taking pride in your property and being an asset in your community. It is about being a good steward towards your neighbors. It is about being financially fit and sound”.

**Nelly Pinedo:** Ms. Pinedo works as a public school bus driver and housekeeper. She lives with her mother and two sons in Bethesda, MD.

“Home ownership has been my dream. Ever since we came to this country 13 years ago, my sons and husband and I have dreamt of having a home to call our own. Unexpectedly my husband died 9 years ago and I was left alone to care for my two sons and elderly mother. Because of the Affordable Housing Conference, we have a dream come true.”

The AHC “Break the Barrier to Homeownership” contest has become an annual event at the county’s Affordable Housing Conference. To date, the contest has awarded \$105,000 to first-time home buyers, making it possible for 16 families to purchase homes in Montgomery County. All 2008 awardees (and their families) will be present at the Affordable Housing Conference on Friday, April 4, 2008 to receive their awards during a 12:30 p.m. luncheon.

ALL MEDIA WELCOME!

INTERVIEW AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE.



**VITALIY BLOKHA**



**CYNTHIA BANGALI**



**NELLY PINEDO**