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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **THE HARRIS COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD FOR HURRICANE KATRINA RESPONSE**

**August 14, 2007 (HOUSTON)** – The Harris County Housing Authority (HCHA) was recently honored by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) with a 2007 Award of Merit for its Hurricane Katrina response program.

The award underscores the historic importance of the program, which used central clearinghouses known as Housing Choice Centers to help more than 23,000 Hurricane Katrina survivors move out of Houston's mass shelters and into longer-term housing solutions.

The program represented a first in disaster response: never before had tens of thousands of people been evacuated to a neighboring state with no hope of returning home and nowhere to live. The HCHA's Housing Choice Centers allowed the evacuees to find housing in a quick and orderly fashion.

The centers were located on site at the Astrodome complex, as well as at Houston's George R. Brown convention center, enabling evacuees to get immediate assistance directly where they were sheltered. The centers were staffed by personnel from numerous agencies, and offered several services:

- Assistance for people who had not previously received any government-assisted housing and now needed it.
- Assistance for people who were on federal-housing vouchers or lived in public-housing complexes.
- Assistance from Continental Airlines, which generously offered to fly all interested evacuees to stay with their families or friends in other states (bus travel was also available through the State of Texas).
- Offers for permanent housing from other public agencies and faith-based communities, including those in New York, Pennsylvania, Colorado, California and Florida.

The Housing Choice Centers began locating apartments for evacuees within 24 hours of their arrival in Houston. The centers placed more than 100 families in housing on the very first day of service alone, and then took dramatic steps to meet the growing demand at the mass shelters.

For example, a team of experts worked around the clock to locate open apartments for evacuees – making more than 200 new apartments available each day for occupancy by Katrina victims, especially seniors and those with special needs.

Once the evacuees had been placed into apartments, the Housing Choice Centers worked with corporate partners to provide provisions and social services, including: mattresses, furniture, bedding, toiletries and cookware, as well as Red Cross visits and food-bank deliveries. They also arranged for the Texas Workforce Commission to help evacuees find jobs.

“The days that followed Hurricane Katrina were full of worry and despair for evacuees who found themselves homeless,” said Guy Rankin, CEO and Executive Director of the HCHA. “We are very pleased that we were able to provide a little bit of hope and comfort to those who needed it most. Of course, much of the credit must go to our partners in the private and public sectors, without which our Housing Choice Centers could not have been a success.”

The NAHRO Award of Merit provides national recognition to the achievement and innovation of NAHRO agency members throughout the country, and provides additional opportunities to inform the public of the best in housing and community development. In addition, the NAHRO Award of Merit creates a resource bank of information on significant, innovative activities performed by housing and redevelopment agencies and community development departments across the nation.

“NAHRO members are consistently on the forefront of innovation in the affordable housing industry. Their work helps millions of Americans nationwide turn units into homes, and downtowns into economic engines,” said NAHRO President Donald J. Cameron. “Their success is truly remarkable: our members see the concrete results of the efforts they are making in their neighborhoods and communities to become better places to live. The winners of the Awards of Merit have created programs that can truly be admired by their colleagues.”

### **About the Harris County Housing Authority**

The Harris County Housing Authority operates housing-voucher programs for more than 2,500 families in Harris County. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has given the Authority its highest performance rating for five years in a row.

For more information on the HCHA, please visit [www.hchatexas.org](http://www.hchatexas.org).

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