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COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION RECEIVES 6 NATIONAL AWARDS FOR ITS EXCELLENCE IN A MULTITUDE OF PROGRAMS

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA. The Los Angeles County Community Development Commission (CDC) – which serves as the County’s affordable housing and economic and community development agency – received six National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) “2004 Merit Awards” for its excellence in a multitude of programs. The awards recognize the CDC for its efforts in youth literacy, community outreach, technology and automation, homeless assistance, and the development of affordable housing.

The CDC received its six awards on the evening of May 2nd at a NAHRO conference in San Diego, California. The annual Merit Awards recognize outstanding achievement in housing and community development programs across the nation. NAHRO (www.nahro.org), established in 1933, is a member organization of housing and community development agencies and professionals throughout the United States, whose mission is to create affordable housing and safe, viable communities that enhance the quality of life for all Americans, especially those of low- and moderate-income.

The following six CDC programs received awards:

- **BLAST OFF Volunteer Program.** In this program, administered by the CDC – which serves at the County’s Housing Authority -- college students earn service-learning hours by providing literacy and homework assistance to youth living at the CDC-owned 713-unit Carmelitos public housing site in Long Beach. The program is a collaboration between the CDC, the California State University at Long Beach, Long Beach City College, and Long Beach Better Learning After School Today (BLAST), a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering the education of local youth. This exciting volunteer program, which is overseen by the CDC’s Housing Management Division, has helped increase the literacy and school performance of participating public housing youth.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Community Meetings.** The CDC administers the largest urban County CDBG program in the nation, and the \$38 million in annual funds are used to improve the quality of life of low- and moderate-income people and areas. The federal government requires a CDBG-funded agency to solicit community input in developing annual and five-year plans that list proposed funding activities. In Los Angeles County, the CDC voluntarily initiated an expanded outreach program, which consisted of a multi-pronged marketing effort and a series of geographically dispersed community meetings. This resulted in significantly increased and more diverse citizen participation than in years past. The large public input enabled the CDC to prepare plans that were more sensitized to identified community needs.
- **CDBG Interactive Financial Manual.** The CDC must review and manage CDBG-related program costs for over 130 agencies that it funds each year. The CDBG Division had a hardcopy Financial Manual that it distributed to its agencies. It contained a variety of instructions and documents, but keeping it current was cumbersome and labor-intensive. The CDC was recognized for converting the hard

copy manual into an interactive version that is available online and on CD-ROM. The new interactive Financial Manual – which includes hyperlinks and downloadable forms -- ensures that agencies have continuous access to up-to-date information. The new manual increases the program compliance rate for the agencies and ensures greater consistency in the delivery of program financial requirements at practically no additional cost to the CDC.

- Criminal Tracking Background Database. The Assisted Housing Division -- which is part of the Housing Authority function of the CDC -- administers the federal Section 8 program. Under this program, over 20,000 households receive vouchers whereby they pay roughly 30 percent of their income for rent with private landlords, with the CDC paying the remainder each month. The CDC enhanced its process for screening out Section 8 applicants with criminal backgrounds by evolving from a manually-driven process to a more automated process with a custom-designed database. The development was cost-effective, since existing staff and resources were used to create it. The database is user-friendly, enables staff to track applicants through the screening process, is adaptable to updating, and ensures that information is secure. As a result, criminal background checks are now done more quickly and accurately. Automated reports are generated, enhancing management's capacity to oversee the process.

- PATH Regional Homeless Center. The People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) Regional Homeless Center, located west of downtown Los Angeles, opened in January of 2002, with 98 beds of transitional housing, complemented with a "shopping mall" setting where many on-site organizations provide services aimed at assisting individuals in achieving self-sufficiency. The center, which had a \$6 million construction cost, came into being, in part, by a CDC loan of over \$900,000, the second largest funding amount the center received from various sources for this project. The loan was administered through the CDC's Housing Development and Preservation Division. Since its opening, the center has provided housing and services to nearly 700 individuals and assisted nearly 600 in finding permanent employment.

- The Village at Willowbrook. The CDC – which serves as the County's redevelopment agency – was instrumental in fostering a public-private partnership that created a 34-unit single family affordable housing development located in the Willowbrook-area of South Los Angeles. For example, the CDC's Economic Redevelopment Division assembled the 3.6-acre site using approximately \$1.8 million in CDBG funds, and the CDC's Housing Development and Preservation Division provided \$875,000 in financing for affordable housing. The \$6.7 million development is situated within the Willowbrook Community Redevelopment Project Area, and participation by the local citizens' advisory group helped ensure that the units were designed with the needs of local families in mind. The village provided first-time homeownership opportunities to local low- and moderate-income households, stabilizes the community, fosters neighborhood pride, and will serve as a catalyst for further revitalization in the redevelopment area.

Carlos Jackson, executive director of the County CDC, said, "These six awards across the range of our programs is testimony to the diversity of talent throughout the Community Development Commission. I thank all the staff for their wonderful work. Through their dedication, they continue to build better lives and better neighborhoods throughout the County, day in, day out."

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