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On April 28, 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency presented the 2009 Regional Energy Star Award for Excellence in Affordable Housing to Thistle Communities for its Blue Vista Neighborhood in Longmont. Alice Madden, Colorado Climate Change Coordinator congratulated Thistle on its achievement.

"Blue Vista is one of the first communities in the country to be both green and affordable to people who earn modest incomes – teachers, health care workers, and retirees," said Mary Roosevelt, Thistle's CEO, "and we thank the EPA for recognizing our efforts."

Blue Vista is a bright spot in the suffering housing industry, thanks to funding from Colorado Division of Housing, Energy Outreach Colorado and others. State Rep. Claire Levy has championed state laws to further green building standards in Colorado, including affordable homes. Ongoing construction of Energy Star homes at Blue Vista creates jobs, and provides training for builders and other non-profits in green building techniques. It also helped City of Longmont develop its green points building code.

Home buyers like RTD bus driver Mike Van Es and his family receive education and counseling so they can choose wise mortgages and sustainable payments. Thistle homeowners are six times more likely to avoid foreclosure than the Colorado average. The well-designed homes will hold value over their life and save \$22,000 in energy bills. "Our utility bills that averaged \$200 per month in our old place are now averaging \$75 or less per month," said Van Es, who moved into Blue Vista with his wife and two children last year.

Thistle designed Blue Vista as a 198-home All-American neighborhood. Thistle will sell 100 homes to income-qualified working families and seniors. Thanks to a HUD grant, these buyers save on cost; they contribute self-help hours to finish their homes with their soon-to-be neighbors. Boulder Creek Life and Home is constructing all 198 homes and is selling the other 98 market rate homes.

Thistle CEO Mary Roosevelt noted, "To make these homes affordable to families earning as little as \$31,000 per year, required smart planning." A simple but innovative wall construction and insulation package, (demonstrated at the award ceremony) creating continuous alignment of the insulation and air barrier, makes the homes tight, quiet and comfortable. Energy Star rated appliances include dishwashers, refrigerators, water heaters, ventilation fans, thermostats and furnaces. The added investment of \$4,000 to \$5,000 per home will pay back four-fold in energy bill savings. Each home is tested and independently rated, performing 33 percent more efficiently than homes built to current code.

The mission of Thistle Communities is to create and preserve quality, permanently affordable rental and ownership homes for working families, seniors and people with disabilities. A non-profit, Thistle is the largest provider of workforce housing in the area, with 1,000 homes serving 4,000 people per year in Boulder County and Northglenn.

"Thistle's Blue Vista development is an outstanding example of affordable green development," said Tom Deyo who leads Green Strategies at NeighborWorks America. "The sustainable community that Blue Vista represents is one model of how affordable housing developers can incorporate green designs into homes that stand apart from other projects. But more importantly, Thistle's Blue Vista community is one that families will want to live in for years to come."

Thistle and the NeighborWorks® Network

NeighborWorks® America provides financial support, technical assistance and training for communities across the nation. Thistle is a member of the nationwide NeighborWorks® network of nearly 4,500 urban, suburban





and rural communities across America. These organizations engage in revitalization strategies that strengthen communities and transform lives. In the last five years alone, NeighborWorks® organizations have generated more than \$12 billion in reinvestment and helped more than 845,000 families of modest means purchase or improve their homes, or secure safe, decent rental or mutual housing. Blue Vista is funded in part by NeighborWorks.

For more information, visit www.thisiscommunities.org.

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