**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**“United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Housing Services gives Housing Kitsap National Award for homeownership program”**

Bremerton, Washington – August 17, 2015. Housing Kitsap (HK) was recently awarded “A Helping Hand in Rural America”. The award selection was in partnership with Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the National Self-Help Housing Conference sponsored by the RCAC, which took place in San Antonio, Texas. HK was selected for its excellence in administering the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program in the Western Region which includes 11 states plus the Western Pacific. Along with HK, three other regions nationwide also were recognized for their outstanding partnership award.

“RCAC, the USDA Rural Development Technical and Management Assistance Contractor for the Western Region, was pleased to nominate HK and the USDA Rural Development offices in Washington State for their outstanding performance and partnership in accomplishing the goals of the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program. Kitsap has been an innovator in developing energy efficient housing and providing this homeownership opportunity to its residents for over thirty three years. USDA Rural Development plays a vital role in financing affordable housing in rural America. Together, with the owner builders, they make a significant impact in providing affordable homeownership in their communities,” said Billie Heath, Rural Development Specialist – Western Region, RCAC.

Fifty years ago, USDA – Rural Housing Services initiated the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program to provide low income families the opportunity to achieve the American dream of homeownership. Since 1982, HK has partnered with USDA receiving the 523 Grant funds to operate this program, which provides the low income households affordable homeownership opportunities in Kitsap County and has provided over 850 affordable homes.

“Housing Kitsap is a leader of the Section 523 Grantee’s in Washington State building more homes per year than any other Self-Help group. In addition to their superior new home construction program, we are pleased to be partnering with them on an acquisition rehabilitation program which works to clean up foreclosed upon Rural Development homes for new program buyers. Their commitment to housing low to very low income rural Americans is unprecedented so it comes as no surprise that they received the ‘Helping Hands Award’ from our Rural Development Administrator Tony Hernandez. We are extremely appreciative of our partnership with Housing Kitsap and look forward to 50 more years of housing Rural Americans with them. Thank you and congratulations,” said Andria Hively, Single Family State Housing State Loan Specialist, USDA – Rural Development.

The Mutual Self-Help participants work together in groups of 8 to 10 building each other homes and contributing approximately 1,200 hours of labor. The hard work, sweat and dedication of these participants and soon-to-be homeowners reduces the overall construction costs and paired with an affordable mortgage from USDA’s - Rural Housing Services plus down payment assistance from Kitsap County’s Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) makes homeownership possible for the low income households in Kitsap County.

Housing Kitsap continues to foster its mission to provide healthy housing communities by building and preserving safe, decent and affordable housing for their clients. Homeownership opportunities are currently available in Poulsbo and future sites will be located in Port Orchard and Kingston.

For more information regarding the Mutual Self-Help program, please contact Housing Kitsap at 360-535-6139 or visit our website at www.housingkitsap.org.

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