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Virginia Housing Honors Outstanding Real Estate Agents and Lenders with Affordable Housing and Finance Hero Awards

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Awards recognize 33 real estate professionals and 33 loan officers

RICHMOND, VA – Virginia Housing recently announced the Affordable Housing Heroes and Affordable Housing Finance Heroes who make a difference in making affordable housing more accessible. The awards honor real estate agents and the loan officers who assisted the most Virginia households attain homeownership through Virginia Housing programs between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025. The agency celebrated these housing heroes at a luncheon in Richmond on Thursday, April 16.

“Our mission to increase affordable housing is fueled by the incredible partners who share our vision,” **said Virginia Housing CEO Tammy Neale**. “The dedication and energy of our lenders and real estate professionals empower homebuyers as they navigate the path to homeownership. Strong partnerships like these are essential to turning the dream of homeownership into a reality for thousands of Virginians.”

Recognizing Real Estate Agents

The Affordable Housing Hero Awards honor buyer-side real estate agents involved in at least six transactions using Virginia Housing’s loan programs. Among the 33 agents recognized, Alyshia Merchant of Divine Fog Realty Company in Lynchburg took home top honors for assisting 15 buyers.

“My passion for helping first-time homebuyers is rooted in my own experience with housing assistance and a deep understanding of how life-changing access to the right resources and guidance can be, especially for those navigating the homebuying process for the first time,” **said Merchant**. “I’ve built my work around education and advocacy, and Virginia Housing’s programs make it possible to turn that into real opportunities. I’m honored to be recognized by Virginia Housing as a top real estate agent.”

Recognizing Mortgage Lenders

The Affordable Housing Finance Hero awards recognize loan originators who closed at least 20 Virginia Housing transactions. The 33 loan officers recognized closed a total of 962 mortgages. Darien Pearce of Southern Trust Mortgage LLC in Virginia Beach received top honors for helping 105 families attain their dream of homeownership.

“I’m truly grateful for the opportunity to have partnered with Virginia Housing over the last 24 years,” **said Pearce**. “Helping first-time homebuyers take life-changing steps into homeownership is more than just my work. It’s something that I take pride in. Knowing the difference we’re making in the communities we serve is what makes this award so meaningful to me.”

You'll find a full list of [Affordable Housing Heroes here](#) and the full list of [Affordable Housing Finance Heroes here](#).

“As the housing inventory crisis continues, the ability to find and finance the purchase of a first home remains a daunting task,” said **Virginia Housing Business Development Training Manager Dan Kern**. “Virginia Housing’s real estate and lending partners go above and beyond to educate homebuyers, help them overcome personal hurdles and obtain the keys to their first home. This segment of the marketplace will always need a trusted advisor to get them to the finish line, and we salute our partners for being there to answer the call.”

Since Virginia Housing’s establishment in 1972 by the Commonwealth as a self-supporting, not-for-profit organization, it has provided more than 250,000 home loans through a variety of innovative programs. Last year, Virginia Housing financed 4,852 home loans for a total of \$1.3 billion.

About Virginia Housing

By investing in the power of home, Virginia Housing transforms where and how thousands of Virginians live and thrive, strengthening communities and the economy. Virginia Housing has worked for over 50 years in partnership with the public and private sectors to help Virginians attain quality, affordable housing. While receiving no state taxpayer dollars, Virginia Housing raises money in capital markets to provide mortgages to first-time homebuyers, financing for rental developments and neighborhood revitalization efforts. Virginia Housing invests in innovations in affordable housing and makes homes for people with disabilities and older Virginians more livable. Learn more at VirginiaHousing.com and review the most recent annual report.

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