

Local

A place to call their own home



(Juan Carlos Pometta Betancourt/Special to The Examiner)
The Ariases are thrilled with their new Habitat for Humanity home because now their children can continue to go to local schools.

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2008-03-01 11:00:00.0

SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO -

For the first time in her life, South City resident Julia Burton, 40, held the keys to her own home, a brand-new three-bedroom house on South San Francisco's Commercial Street — and she helped build it herself.

After years of chasing low rents and sharing close quarters with relatives, Burton and members of four other families moved into new, below-market-rate homes Friday.

Peninsula Habitat for Humanity, which builds affordable housing in San Mateo County, picked the families from more than 100 applicants.

The terms of the deal? No down payment, no interest, and a mortgage that costs only 30 percent of the owner's income.

"I'm no longer renting. I'm not throwing my money down the drain anymore," Burton said. "My children will have their own room and we'll be able to have people over."

As part of the program, the families had to complete 500 hours of so-called sweat equity building their houses with other volunteers.

Ronnie Celio, who works for a shipping company in Emeryville, spent his weekends and vacation days installing windows, painting the exterior of the house, waterproofing, and laying shingles on the roof of his family's new home.

Since moving from the Philippines 12 years ago, Celio's wife and two children have shared a house with five other relatives.

Celios' neighbors are also immigrants moving into their first home. Tito and Edith Arias work in South San Francisco and said they wanted to remain in the area so their three children could continue going to local schools.

"We worked very hard to provide homes for low-income families so they can get the feeling of the American dream," said South City Mayor Pedro Gonzalez. "Some of them will have the opportunity to go buy larger homes later on."

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