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Authority earmarks \$98,815 for rural housing repairs

By Amy Revak, Herald-Standard 09/14/2008 Updated 09/15/2008 12:06:07 AM EDT

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The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is one of only three organizations across the state to receive part of a federal \$9.1 million grant to use for the repair or rehabilitation of housing in rural areas.

The redevelopment authority will receive \$98,815 to assist 11 low-income homeowners as a part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Housing Preservation Grant.

Andrew French, executive director of the redevelopment authority, said Friday the authority has been successful in receiving the competitive grant funding for nearly all of the 20-plus years it has applied for the money.



The authority did not receive funding last year. It was only the second time the authority has been passed over.

French said the USDA grant funding, along with other state and federal allocations, would be combined to rehabilitate about 42 houses this year.

French said since 1975, when the county program began, more than 1,400 houses across the county have been rehabilitated.

While the money is given to the redevelopment authority as a grant, it is generally passed along to the homeowners as a zero percent deferred loan that doesn't have to be paid back until the property is sold, French said.

French said the repairs focus on items such as roofing, windows, doors, electrical and plumbing, but other repairs that make a visible benefit to the outside of the property are done also.

"Our first priority is to bring the homes up to code, but we also make improvements to benefit the neighborhood," French said.

Earlier this week, Thomas C. Dorr, U.S. Agriculture under secretary for rural development, announced that 148 groups and people across the county have been selected to receive the grants to repair or rehabilitate housing owned or occupied by low-income rural citizens.

The awards will be distributed in 49 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

"Helping rural citizens obtain safe and affordable housing is one of USDA Rural Development's major goals," Dorr said. "I am pleased that these funds will be used to help homeowners and apartment owners across the nation make the necessary improvements to their properties. The grants will help fix problems such a leaking roofs, unsafe plumbing or crumbling foundations."

According to a press release from the USDA, grants are awarded to intermediaries such as town or county governments, Indian tribes, housing authorities or nonprofit organizations, which in turn give the money to homeowners or owners of multi-family rental properties or cooperative dwellings.

The other two Pennsylvania organizations to receive funds were Armstrong County and the Wayne County Redevelopment Authority. Each of the three Pennsylvania agencies received \$98,815.

Funding of each recipient is contingent upon their meeting the conditions of the grant agreement. A complete list of the selected recipients is posted on the USDA Rural Development Web site at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/newsroom/2008/09-10-2008-HPGrf.pdf Hyperlink>

USDA Rural Development's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural residents. Rural Development has invested more than \$90 billion since 2001 for equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development and critical community and technology infrastructure.

More than 1.7 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Additional information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA Rural Development's Web site at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov Hyperlink>

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