Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County Launches Sonoma Wildfire Cottage Initiative

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Santa Rosa, CA, June 06, 2018 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County announced today the launch of The Sonoma Wildfire Cottage Initiative, a pilot program of temporary cottages designed to test and learn from the construction industry's most innovative building technologies. In partnership with renowned Katrina Cottage developer and designer Marianne Cusato of Cypress Community Development Corporation, the program will showcase the work of three different building technologies through the construction of state-of-the art cottages on the Medtronic Fountaingrove campus.

Medtronic is donating use of the land to Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County, which will build between 8 and 10 temporary cottages for families who lost their homes directly or indirectly due to the October 2017 wildfires. The cottages to be built on Medtronic's land will be designed as efficient, cost effective, timely, and volunteer-friendly solutions for long-term affordable and workforce housing in Sonoma County. In addition to donating use of the land, the Medtronic Foundation has donated $100,000 to further Habitat for Humanity's relief efforts in Sonoma County.

Founded by Senses Wines, Rebuild Wine Country is a charitable effort managed by volunteer wine industry professionals from both Napa and Sonoma counties. The team has raised $1 million thus far, with a goal of raising $5 million for the Sonoma Wildfire Cottage Initiative and additional rebuild efforts by other local Habitat for Humanity organizations in the North Bay.

"Prior to the wildfires our affiliate had already begun exploring modern approaches to reduce affordable housing costs while increasing production due to Sonoma County being one of the least affordable counties in the nation," said John Kennedy, interim CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County and Chairman of the board. "The devasting October wildfires destroyed over 5,200 homes in Sonoma County, which made our housing crisis dramatically worse. This pilot project helps us quickly evaluate a variety of technologies while simultaneously helping families in dire need of stable temporary housing. We are delighted with the multiple partners who have stepped forward to make this project a success."

The three companies chosen to participate in the program are Connect-Homes, GigaCrete/Presidio Realty Advisors, and West Coast SIPs. Cypress Community Development Corporation, which specializes in disaster recovery housing programs, will oversee the building and development process with input from the affected communities and stakeholders. Opticos Design, of Berkley, CA is designing the master plan for the development.

Chris Strieter, executive director of Rebuild Wine Country, said: "It's heartwarming to see the outpouring of support. Many believe Sonoma and Napa Counties are affluent and therefore don't need charitable dollars; nothing could be further from the truth. The high concentration of wealth dramatically affects the area median income resulting in astronomically high housing costs, so if we don't mobilize to build housing that our workers can afford, the wine and tourism-based economic foundation will remain in peril and potentially crumble."

"We are excited to partner with Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County and Rebuild Wine County to showcase an unprecedented range of prefabricated building solutions," said Marianne Cusato of Cypress Community Development Corp. "With the labor shortage in the building industry, coupled with rising material costs, it is nearly impossible to meet the demand for affordable workforce housing, not just in Sonoma County, but across the nation. This project is a laboratory for the future of residential home building nationwide."

Construction on the cottages is expected to begin this summer and the anticipated date for occupancy late fall and early winter of this year.

Additional funding in the form of a grant of $150,000 was provided by Redwood Credit Union Community Fund, Inc., in partnership with *The Press Democrat* and the Office of Senator Mike McGuire.

Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County will hold a press conference and community event on Wednesday, June 6th at 4:00 p.m. at the Medtronic site, 3593 Round Barn Blvd., Santa Rosa, CA 95403, to unveil the designs/building technologies used and give members of the community and the media the opportunity to see first-hand the plans and ask questions of the partners.

About Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County

Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County has been bringing people together to build homes, communities and hope since 1984. Our affiliate, one of over 1000 in the United States, is in rapid transition to greatly expand the number of homes and families we build and serve. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and purchase them with an affordable mortgage. Habitat homes remain affordable as long as the need exists for affordable

homes. Building on our 2021 Strategic Plan and in response to the October 2017 wildfires, Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County will serve more people than ever before through decent and affordable housing. Find more information at www.habitatsoco.org.

About Rebuild Wine Country

Founded by Senses Wines, Rebuild Wine Country is a group of volunteer wine industry professionals working with Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County to raise $5 million to rebuild owned and rented homes lost in Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Mendocino and Lake county wildfires. Find more information at **www.rebuildwinecountry.org.**

About Cypress Community Development Corporation & Marianne Cusato

Cypress Community Development Corp, a not for profit housing development division of the DC based strategic advisory and advocacy firm The Cypress Group, specializes in developing innovative housing solutions for disaster rebuilding and workforce housing. Together with Marianne Cusato, Cypress Community Development Corporation built 450 Katrina Cottages in Louisiana through FEMA funding and affordable housing sources and is currently constructing homes in the Florida Keys rebuilding following Hurricane Irma. Find more information at **www.CypressGroupDC.com** and **www.MarianneCusato.com.**