



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
Southwest Home Energy Raters
L. Javier Ruiz
5400 Suncrest Dr. C-6
El Paso, TX. 79912
915-613-4168
505-635-4320
www.swher.com
jruiz@swher.com

Maria Vargas, (202) 343-9451
vargas.maria@epa.gov

EPA NAMES Southwest Home Energy Raters ENERGY STAR[®] 2006 PARTNER OF THE YEAR

Southwest Home Energy Raters earns award for protecting the environment through energy efficiency

[El Paso, Texas, March 1st] – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has named Southwest Home Energy Raters as an ENERGY STAR 2006 *Partner of the Year* for its outstanding contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through its work as a home energy rater analyzing and testing the energy efficiency of homes. Southwest Home Energy Raters's accomplishments will be recognized at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. on March 21, 2006.

Southwest Home Energy Raters, an ENERGY STAR partner since 2004, is being honored for their work in qualifying new homes to earn the ENERGY STAR. Home energy raters provide the independent third party verification required for ENERGY STAR qualified homes. An ENERGY STAR home gets its qualification thru a building analysis and inspection process which has to comply with the EPA's building guidelines for Energy Efficiency; elements like insulation, windows, heating and cooling equipment, air sealing and other aspects of the home are inspected, concluding with a final diagnostics and tests.

"Southwest Home Energy Raters takes great pride in our accomplishments together with ENERGY STAR," said L. Javier Ruiz, President of SWHER. "By working with homebuilders, we are able to ensure that consumers get a comfortable and more durable home that lowers their utility bills while protecting the environment."

The Partner of the Year Award is given to a variety of organizations to recognize their contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by promoting energy-efficient homes in their community. Award winners are selected from over 8,000 organizations that participate in the ENERGY STAR program. Southwest Home Energy Raters's accomplishments help homeowners enjoy quieter and more comfortable homes while saving money on utility bills.

Last year alone, with the help of ENERGY STAR, Americans saved \$12 billion on their energy bills and enough peak energy to power 28 million homes. Through those savings they avoided greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those of more than 23 million vehicles.

"Partners like Southwest Home Energy Raters are very important to the ENERGY STAR program," said Kathleen Hogan, director of EPA's Climate Protection Partnerships Division. "With the knowledge and expertise provided by leading home raters, we are rapidly increasing the number of families living in homes that offer the very best in terms of efficiency, comfort, and durability, all while helping to protect the environment."

About Southwest Home Energy Raters

Southwest Home Energy Raters (SWHER) started introducing the Energy Star program to El Paso, Tx. and Las Cruces, NM. in 2004. SWHER began operations in June 2004 and last year there were only 5 Energy Star Builders locally, to this day there are more than 35 Energy Star Builders in El Paso and Las Cruces that have started making a difference by building Energy Star Homes. This means that there are Home Builders that have decided to join the EPA's efforts to reduce our environments pollution and dependence on foreign oil, thru Energy Efficiency. El Paso is a good example of how a market that almost two years ago didn't have any Energy Star Homes and Builders, today has a considerable percentage of local builders that have started and this year alone have been started to build more than 700 Energy Star homes in the area.

SWHER strongly believes that we have made a big difference by promoting the Energy Star Home Program in our area. The impact to the environment is substantial and from this day on a big percentage of our local builders will be making a difference because they have changed for the better with the ENERGY STAR Program for Homes.

About ENERGY STAR

ENERGY STAR was introduced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 as a voluntary market-based partnership to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through increased energy efficiency. Today, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy, the program offers businesses and consumers energy-efficient solutions to save energy, money and help protect the environment for future generations. More than 8,000 organizations are ENERGY STAR partners committed to improving the energy efficiency of products, homes and businesses. For more information about ENERGY STAR, visit www.energystar.gov or call toll-free 1-888-STAR-YES (1-888-782-7937).

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