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**ATLANTA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY AND THE AETNA FOUNDATION PARTNER TO
BOOST HISPANIC HOMEOWNERSHIP IN THE CITY OF ATLANTA**

September 27, 2004 – The Hernandez-Martinez family, who came to Atlanta from Mexico in 2001, will move into their new Atlanta Habitat for Humanity home Friday, October 15. Martha Hernandez, Mauricio Martinez and their two young children make up the first Hispanic family to move into their home since Atlanta Habitat launched its Hispanic Outreach Initiative in 2003, and they represent the beginning of a trend—there are already five additional Hispanic families qualified to become homeowners. Atlanta Habitat’s Hispanic Outreach program, funded by a generous grant from the Aetna Foundation, increased its percentage of qualified Hispanic applicants to 11 percent of all homebuyers in 2004. Friday is a banner day for Atlanta Habitat and the Aetna Foundation, demonstrating that efforts to reach out to Atlanta’s Hispanic Community are successful, and it is a momentous occasion for the Hernandez-Martinez family, as they make the important financial investment of homeownership.

Martha and Mauricio moved to the United States three years ago in order to find work and provide opportunity for their daughter Carolina, then three years old. When they arrived, they moved into a one-bedroom apartment in the East Point neighborhood with Mauricio’s family, who had already immigrated to Georgia. Though the family is very tight-knit, the living conditions were not ideal; there were many people sharing a cramped space, and meanwhile, Martha and Mauricio were expecting another child. After Mauricio found a job in the warehouse at DynCorp, the couple moved to a one-bedroom apartment of their own and Martha began selling Mary Kay products to help support the family. This new apartment was less cramped, but it did not feel safe and they decided to move again. The hardworking young family moved two more times before settling on the apartment where they now live. This is one reason why finding Atlanta Habitat was such a relief.

Larrie Del Martin, Executive Director of Atlanta Habitat, explained that the organization made a plan to reach out to Atlanta's Hispanic Community when one of their existing Hispanic homeowner families shared the incredible need for affordable homeownership in the Hispanic community. "It is important to me and to the organization not to ignore any segment of the city's population that has a need for affordable homeownership," says Martin. "We want to cross cultural and language barriers to share our affordable homeownership opportunities—luckily, the Aetna Foundation heard and shared our concern for reaching out, and they made our Hispanic Outreach Initiative a reality." Atlanta Habitat uses a number of tactics to reach out to the Hispanic community in Atlanta. Networking with organizations connected to the Hispanic community, making presentations in Spanish, offering all application materials in Spanish, training staff members through conversational Spanish courses and employing a Spanish-speaking intern to help candidates complete the application and construction processes are among the most effective. Martha first learned about Atlanta Habitat at her current teaching job at Sheltering Arms Day Care Center, where Atlanta Habitat has done outreach presentations and where a fellow employee was an Atlanta Habitat homeowner. She discovered the Hispanic Outreach program in an article in a Hispanic newspaper which prompted her to call.

For Martha Hernandez, finding Atlanta Habitat and building a family home has been a dream come true. She reports, "I know that my kids will have something in the future and that all of our hard work has been for a reason." Martha and Mauricio are excited to move in and begin decorating their home, adding the personal touches that will make it familiar. The children, Carolina and Mauricio, Jr., will be able to play outside while their parents work in the yard. Both Martha and Mauricio are avid gardeners and water their newly planted landscaping every two days, even though they have not yet moved. The new homeowner couple will welcome Martha's brother Oscar Hernandez, who volunteered 30 hours building their house, into their home. It will be a place where this strong family can grow even stronger. Marta says that her new house "means the world" to her and that it is a manifestation of the peace and liberty that they were seeking when they moved to Atlanta from Mexico three years ago.

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