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Owning home luck of the draw

Housing group holds lottery for 20 Salinas residences

By Shawna Williams
[The Californian](#)

Dozens of Salinas men, women and children gathered Wednesday on Main Street for the chance to own a home. Twenty houses, priced between \$212,500 and \$226,500, were at stake in a lottery with 533 applicants. The houses would ordinarily cost \$300,000 or more. The nonprofit Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association -- CHISPA -- has conducted similar programs to give low-income people opportunities to own homes, but this was its first moderate-income housing program.

To qualify for the program, applicants had to bring in 120 percent or less of Monterey County's median annual family income -- a maximum of \$64,550 for a family of four. The first 50 applicants picked Wednesday will have until Dec. 2 to complete pre-qualification paperwork. The first 20 to pre-qualify will be able to purchase one of the homes. Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA's president, emphasized that financial planning is more important than the lottery when it comes to buying a home.

"The key is not being No. 1, but being ready," he said. Many people have bad credit or too much debt, disqualifying them from a home-buyer's loan, he said. Often there is only one qualified family for every

10 to 12 applicants, so even someone who came out at No. 200 in the lottery may still have a chance. Salinas Mayor Anna Caballero also addressed the crowd of about 60 people, saying, "Housing has gone through the roof, and salaries have not kept up with housing."

CHISPA, she said, is helping to address this problem. Caballero then drew applications one-by-one out of a rubber garbage can, while Diaz-Infante read the names of the first 50 applicants. The crowd stood quietly. There were no joyous shouts or tears of disappointment. Laura Presti-Sandoval, a dental office manager whose husband is a painter, was not among the first 50. Asked about the couple's prospects for home ownership, she said, "The cost is too high -- we'll just keep renting."



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