

MOTOR CITY PRIZEWINNER: A free home of their own

Detroiter to get refurbished house

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For Jeneatre Graham and her four children, the best present came the day after Christmas.

During halftime of the 2005 Motor City Bowl on Monday, Graham learned that she was the winner of a free house.

The northwest Detroit house once was abandoned, but has been renovated by the Motor City Blight Busters.

Nearly 2,000 people applied to win the home. A five-member committee reviewed the applications and chose five finalists. Applicants had to write a 1,000-word essay about why she or he should receive the home. Applicants also had to earn \$30,000 or less per year, take a drug test and agree to a criminal background check. The new owner is required to purchase homeowner's insurance and pay the property taxes.

Organizers of the giveaway told Graham that she was a semifinalist. She didn't realize she actually had won until she was brought out on the field and her name was announced.

"It's a blessing," she said.

Graham, 29, was working at a Laundromat when a regular customer gave her an application for the giveaway.

Graham works for a staffing agency in Detroit but is studying to be a medical assistant. In the essay with her application, she said she wanted to "offer her family a better environment." She currently lives with her four children, ages 11, 9, 4 and 3 in an apartment on Detroit's west side.

Blight Busters and its corporate sponsors spent the past two months renovating the 1,000-square-foot, two-bedroom home on Grandville Street in Detroit, donated by a retired Detroit police officer.

John George, founder and president of Blight Busters, said the giveaway was the organization's first, and part of its mission to increase home ownership in the city of Detroit.

"I feel very fortunate that we are in a position to do what we do," he said, adding that it couldn't have been done without corporate partners.

Bob Miller, president of Team Solutions Inc., and longtime friend Ken Hoffman, executive director of the Motor City Bowl, came up with the idea for giving away the home.

Volunteers from Blight Busters and their partners, Qualigence, Team Solutions, Countrywide Home Loans, Good Faith Homes and Keys Realty, also participated.

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Jeneatre Graham, 29, of Detroit reacts to the news at the Motor City Bowl on Monday that she and her children, Rodetria Jones, 4, left, Rodrick Jones Jr., 3, Anthony Stone, 11, and Antonio Graham, 9, won a home. (RASHAUN RUCKER/Detroit Free Press)