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ABC's Extreme Makeover Home Edition Featured Family Helped by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority

Chicago, Illinois – September 29, 2008 - Felicia Jackson, who fulfilled her sister's dying wish by vowing to raise her 10 children, in addition to her own four, was the beneficiary of a new home and new hope—courtesy of ABC's *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, community builder, Classic Homes, and the Gaithersburg, MD chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. The Jackson story was the feature of the season premiere of the ABC hit show, which aired Sunday evening.

Felicia's journey began in 2004, when her sister Cassandra died of cervical cancer. Before she passed, she asked Felicia to promise to keep her 10 children together and to love, care for and raise them. After keeping her promise, suddenly Felicia's family grew to 14 children, since she had four of her own. The kids ranged in age from 1 to 14 years: eleven of the children were in school, and the three youngest stayed home.

Felicia gladly assumed this awesome responsibility because of her love for family. Having grown up in foster care, Cassandra and Felicia had dreamed all of their lives about how they were going to keep their families together. With Cassandra gone, it was up to Felicia to make those dreams come true.

Soon after Cassandra passed, Xi Sigma Omega Chapter of Gaithersburg, MD learned about this family. Chapter members galvanized around the family and immediately started rendering assistance. Over the years, the Chapter provided food, Christmas presents, birthday presents, new coats for all of the children, shoes, holiday baskets, school supplies and entertainment packages. Above all, non-material support and time devoted to help Felicia meet her family needs proved invaluable.

However, at the core of Felicia's challenge was trying to keep everyone under one roof, as she promised her sister.

Housing 14 children presented an immediate challenge. When cited for overcrowding in rental property, Felicia sent her own children to stay with relatives within the community to keep her promise of having her nieces and nephews together. Five years later, housing remained an issue.

Extreme Makeover learned about this family and built a house by Classic Homes, a community builder that believes in donating to worthy causes. Xi Sigma Omega members and people throughout the community volunteered to help build the house.

The new home is an architectural wonder, with plenty of room, including a spacious kitchen and dining area where everyone can eat together. Most of all, the home is decorated with remembrances of Cassandra as well as tributes to Felicia for her love and strength in keeping the family together.

It is a vow she was able to keep because Alpha Kappa Alpha embraced the family and was steadfast in its support.

As a show of her gratitude, Felicia invited members of the Chapter to watch the telecast and celebrate with her and the children.

"The AKAs are the best and are the family that I have never had," Jackson said after the show. "Everything that they do is from their hearts. I love them for everything that they have done for the family."

While the gifting of the house represents a dramatic show of generosity and a tremendous boost to the family, Chapter president Carolyn Henderson Walker said, "There are lots of things she still needs, and the Chapter remains very committed to assist the family."

Walker said the Chapter has raised \$40,000 toward a \$50,000 pledge it made in June, for a trust fund to help the family with maintenance costs and household expenses.

Alpha Kappa Alpha's international president, Barbara A. McKinzie said the Sorority's devotion to the family mirrors its credo: to provide service to all mankind.

Said McKinzie, "Felicia Jackson is a true hero, and her strength and loyalty both motivate and uplift. Alpha Kappa Alpha is proud to have come to her rescue and to have embraced her. Inspired by the vow she made to her sister and by her example, we promise to continue to provide service, resources and unconditional love to this dynamic family."

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