



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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Nahata Dziil Chapter celebrates groundbreaking of much needed shopping center

SANDERS, Ariz. — Before medicine man Ram Herder, 89, began the traditional groundbreaking ceremony for the Nahata Dziil Shopping Center, he recollected a story once shared with him.

It was a story of a young man who was always trying to plan something for his people. The young man wanted to help build his community, but his people would only mock him. They made fun of his plans and they made fun of him because he was friends with the Turkey.

The young man sought strength through prayer and eventually the Holy People intervened. They instructed him to get a log and make a "hole" in the log. They said they would help him seal the log and get him down the river safely. They told him the river would end and he was instructed to get off there.

The young man did as he was told and when he arrived at the new land, four turkeys came in from each of the four directions. The turkeys shook their feathers and four stones fell to the ground: turquoise, abalone, white shell and black jet. The young man was told to plant the stones. Soon corn and other vegetables began to grow, and the vegetation began attracting other animals to the lush land.

Back in the old land, drought struck and the man's people eventually made their way to the new place. When they arrived, the young man welcomed them.

Nathan Begay, chapter house president, offered the story in English to non-Navajo speaking audience members who sat among community members underneath a large tent on the morning of Sept. 17.

"In a way it fits in with this area," Begay said. "It's almost like the destiny of these people."

Begay is referring to the "New Lands," the area the Nahata Dziil Chapter represents and the location of the upcoming shopping center. The New Lands area is a planned community that came about as a result of the Navajo-Hopi Relocation Commission. Many Navajo families were removed from their original homelands, or what is now known as the Hopi Partitioned Lands.

Begay believes strongly the story shared by medicine man Ram Herder fits in context with the community. When Herder shared the story with Begay years ago, he knew it would be appropriate to have the traditional ceremony conducted by Herder and to share the story with community members.

The history of the relocation was brought up by a number of leaders and officials who attended the ceremony and celebration. Council Delegate Sampson Begay (Jeddito/Steamboat/Low Mountain) reminisced to 1987 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs began planning the community of New Lands.

"There was a lot of crying, there was a lot of uncertainty," said Begay. A number of elders in the crowd nodded their heads in agreement.

"But today is a joyous day," said Begay. Community members agreed with applause.



Begay said, since then, the community has come a long way and is now looking at a blown-up building design of their upcoming shopping center.

The community first expressed interest in a shopping center more than ten years ago. They believed it would be a perfect place because of its location right off Interstate 40. Several resolutions were passed to push for the center.

The Nahata Dziil Chapter House was appropriated \$2.2 million for a shopping center last budget session by the Navajo Nation Council. The money will be used for basic infrastructure, site development costs and utility plans.

Jeanette Jones, economic development specialist with the Division of Economic Development, said the pre-development will start within a month. Jones said Bashas' Diné Market, Sandia Oil, and Navajo Arts and Crafts Enterprise have all confirmed they will be tenants in the shopping center. There is also going to be a coin-operated laundromat and efforts for a medical chiropractor and a food establishment are also underway. The block building will be 30,000 square feet.

Lorenzo Curley (Houck/Lupton/Nahata Dziil) and former delegate Ernie Hubbell (Houck/Lupton/Nahata Dziil) sponsored the legislation. Curley said the community was adamant about getting the project done.

"I remember seeing the first documents of the planning before I even became a delegate," he said, gesturing with his hands how thick the stack was. "It's a great feeling to know its going to get done."

Jones said the projected date of completion will be in the year 2010 since the division takes into consideration possible delays due to winter weather. Site development will take two to four months, and the actual building of the shopping center will take up to ten months. The project will provide around 50 temporary construction jobs and more than 120 permanent jobs.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$7 million and Jones said current funding will only cover costs of infrastructure. The remaining money, she said, will most likely come from federal grant programs that determine funding based on how committed a community is to the project.

In the meantime, Begay said they are brainstorming ways to bring the cost down.

"What we're going to do here is come back together and really evaluate the whole cost," he said.

Tim Goodluck (Houck/Lupton/Nahata Dziil) acknowledged the staff for continuing their efforts to improve the community, and Lorenzo Bates (Upper Fruitland) congratulated them for their persistence and perseverance in making sure the resolutions they passed came to fruition.

Several officials and leaders are convinced the upcoming shopping center will entice entities to bring business to the area.

Arnold Begay, chapter vice-president, said the center will provide young people with jobs and will lower turnover rates for teachers since basic necessities would be more accessible.

Communities located in the New Lands area, include: Rural Community, Chambers, Middle Well, Little Silversmith, Parker Draw, Navajo Springs, Hogan Well, Rim Range, East Mill, Hard Scrabble, Antelope Well, Blue Bird, North Well, Kelsey and Barth Lake.

"The Nahata Dziil Chapter became the 110th chapter on the Navajo Nation in 1991, but it hasn't stopped them from moving forward and making progress," said Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan. The chapter is the first full Local Governance Act certified chapter of the Navajo Nation, the second chapter to be certified for the Five Management System and the second chapter certified for Community Land Use Planning.

For Begay, the most important thing he believes will ensure the shopping center will be built is the prayers and songs conducted at the groundbreaking ceremony. Herder sang four traditional corn songs, and at the end of each song, four chapter officials used a piece of greasewood to scratch into the earth where the center will be built. The sticks, Herder said, represent the four sacred stones.

"I think its working because we were able to meet with the relocation office on Monday," Begay said. "We don't have any figures in place, but they are willing to participate in the financing."

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