



**NAVAJO NATION
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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Housing Improvement Program conducts inspections of ARRA homes



Charlie Begay of Pinon signs paperwork for his new home, built with funding from ARRA. The \$2.3 million project provided 22 new homes in all five agencies of the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation Housing Improvement Program constructed the homes with the aid of over 50 carpenters. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK—Some of the poorest elders in the Navajo Nation now have homes.

Funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act built 22 new homes in all five agencies of the Navajo Nation.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said ARRA funding has made a positive impact on the needs of the Navajo Nation.

“The Navajo Nation has been strengthened by these funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Not only were homes constructed, but new jobs were also created,” Shelly said.

ARRA funds were funneled through the U.S. Department of Interior to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and finally, to the Navajo Nation Housing Improvement Program.

Arbin Mitchell, director of Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, said the new homes improved the quality of life for Navajo families.

“These new homes were built to meet the needs of the elderly homeowners,” Mitchell said. “Now, they have a house that will not only shelter them but keep them relatively comfortable.”

The NNHIP is currently executing final inspections for all homes

built with ARRA funds, from June 15, 2011 through July 8.

Darrell Jimson, ARRA Planner and Estimator, is on the road for the next month with his construction crew, turning over keys to new homeowners.

Jimson said his crew is also inspecting the homes and fixing any issues that are uncovered.

On June 15, Pinon residents Charlie and Helen Begay received keys to the new two-bedroom, one bathroom home. The couple was appreciative and thanked the construction crew for work on the new home over the past six months.

Speaking in Navajo, Charlie Begay said the new home was a major improvement over the couple’s previous home.

Lead carpenter Timothy Tsosie said he ensured the construction went according to the blueprints.

“We should build more homes like this for our elders,” Tsosie said.

Alice Willie of Pinon exited the hot conditions of her hogan to walk the perimeter of her new home and inspected the interior with the construction crew.

Willie said she was thankful for the new home but became emotional when she spoke of her old home that sheltered her family.

Her new home features partial disability amenities such as wide doorways to accommodate a wheelchair and a spacious kitchen and bathroom to match the same. Low windows, lever door openers and a ramp with railings were also included.

LaVerne Benally, program manager for HIP, said the program has helped a lot of Navajo elders.

“We’re building these homes at a cost of \$107,045. It’s like an eye opening experience because a lot of these elders never had a home like the ones we built for them,” Benally said. “They’re so overwhelmed.”

Blue Gap resident Betty Burbank also received keys and certificate of home ownership after returning from an afternoon at the Cottonwood Senior Citizens Center.

“It’s like an eye-opening experience because a lot of these elders never had a home like the ones we built for them.”

Burbank was thankful for the new home and said the winters were always a concern. Her new home was sealed against the elements.

Carpenter Aaron Denny worked on all five homes in the Chinle Agency and said the clients were all very thankful for the new homes.

“Some of the houses that were here before were nothing like these (new homes). It’s a big deal for the homeowners,” Denny said.

The program will repair any warranty issues on the homes for a period of one year, after which, all repairs will be the responsibility of the homeowner.

The ARRA funding was awarded as a one-time funding in the amount of \$2,355,000. The funding began on Sept 24, 2009 and will end on September 30, 2011.

The NNHIP served the “neediest of the needy” and clients selected met the eligibility requirements of 25 CFR, Part 256, which defines the terms and conditions under which assistance is given to Indians under the Housing Improvement Program.

Applicants were ranked and provided certificate of Indian blood, evidence of low income, proof of substandard housing, confirmation they have no other resources for housing, home site lease, elderly or handicap status, and verification they received no assistance since 1986.

On June 16, John and Nellie Lee of Rocky Ridge received their certificate of homeownership and keys to their new home. John Lee was herding sheep and had to return home to sign the necessary paperwork.

The couple said they previously lived in cramped quarters and turned out the lights early each evening, before retiring for the day.

“Now, we have all this space,” Nellie Lee said in Navajo.

Archie Becenti, building inspector for HIP, oversaw the completion of all 22 homes, from the ground up. Becenti was also the architect that designed the homes.

“They’re designed for older people,” Becenti said.

Becenti has over 20 years experience in construction, in all phases of the industry. He said the Navajo Nation needs new homes throughout the reservation.

Becenti said, “When (homeowners) signed up for the homes, it was 10 to 15 years ago. They were healthy and by the time their home was built, they’re old.”

The homes were built on approved Navajo Nation home sites. The old homes were demolished and the new homes built atop the old site.

Funded by ARRA, the new homes not only changed the lives of the homeowners but also provided work for many working on the project. The funds gave temporary employment for a workforce of 50-plus Navajo carpenters.

Administrative costs from the \$2.3 million project amounted to 20 percent and the remaining 80 percent was for direct services associated with construction activities.

Karlene Zajicek, housing program officer for BIA, said the new homes are beautiful.

“I think the elders, the grandmas and grandpas are going to enjoy them,” Zajicek said. “The importance is that families are finally receiving and having access to standard, sanitary homes that are warm in the winter and cool in the summer.”

Information: www.nndcd.org

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Betty Burbank of Blue Gap reminisces about her old home and the family she raised. Navajo Nation Housing Improvement Program Manager LaVerne Benally listens intently during final inspections of homes funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Rocky Ridge, Ariz. residents John and Nellie Lee welcomed the construction of their new home, after raising a family in the cramped conditions of their old house. John Lee had to return from the grazing area where he was herding sheep to sign paperwork. (Photo by Rick Abasta)