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President Begaye inspects Tohajiilee water well, meets with chapter president



President Russell Begaye inspects the Tohajiilee water well pump that failed on May 15, after being in service for 15 months. The chapter estimated the cost to replace the pump and the galvanized steel pipes at \$30,000. President Begaye also met with the chapter president Raymond Secatero. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

TOHAJIILEE, N.M.—Water well number five has been repaired.

On Sunday morning, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye visited the Tohajiilee NHA housing development and the inoperable water well to ensure the necessary repairs were made expeditiously for the residents.

Children riding bicycles circled around the neighborhood streets as President Begaye checked on the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority water tanker parked in the neighborhood to supply residents with potable water.

Several portable restrooms provided by NHA also lined the neighborhood streets for use by residents.

“Thank you to NTUA for assisting our Navajo families in the community here,” President Begaye said. “Although they don’t provide services for this portion of the Navajo Nation, they still came out to help.

“We also appreciate the assistance of the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management and NHA,” he added.

The NHA housing subdivision is located 3.3 miles north of I-40 on West Rio Puerco Road.

Raymond Secatero, chapter president, briefed President Begaye and led him to the site of the damaged water well.

The well is located north of the subdivision, away from the highway and accessible only by a dirt road. The chapter was ready to repair the well on May 16, but the weather, especially lighting, prevented the work crew from accessing the site.

The Tohajiilee Chapter, due to its satellite community status, operates and maintains its own water works system, with more than 50 miles of waterline to service the vast community.

Water system operator Mark Begay was onsite overseeing the repair of the water well pump.

He said pump house number five went out of service on May 15 after about 15 months of use.

“This is our only production well. We have real bad water. It’s rust, hydrogen sulfide. It rusts out our draw pipes in about two years,” Begay said.

The rusted pipes and burned out water pump were laid out on the ground. Several pipes were separated because pinhole-sized punctures were discovered.

The motor will be taken apart to see if it’s salvageable. If so, it will be returned to the manufacturer for reconditioning, to provide the chapter with a spare.

The new pipes, made from galvanized steel, are connected to the 18-stage, 50 horsepower motor that draws water from the ground at a rate of 160 gallons per minute. The drilling company, based in Milan, N.M. was able to secure a new pump from a company in Clovis.

The other four wells in the community are inoperable and both Secatero and Begay said the community is in need of a backup system.

“We tried upgrading and rehabilitating some of those older wells, but we’ve only been able to get about 30 to 40 gallons a minute,” Begay said. “We have a big community and there’s about 50 miles of waterline.”

He estimated the cost of the repairs at about \$30,000.

The water pipes and motor go down to a depth of 800 feet. The total depth of the well is 900 feet. During an onsite test, the pipes hit water 72 feet below the surface of the earth.

“We appreciate the quick response from the nation, from President Begaye all the way down to the departments. It’s good to know that we have a president that’s dedicated and true to his word, as far as helping out at the community level,” Secatero said.

Secatero is on his second term as chapter president. He was a three-term council delegate in the 1970s, when the council was comprised of 74 delegates. He said the main challenges for the satellite community are housing and economic development.

“We need to begin developing something where there’s revenue coming into the community to offset some of the costs and expenses that we have regarding health, water, land and livestock issues,” he said.

Rose Whitehair, director of NNDEM, reported at 5:15 p.m. that the water well pump was operating and that it would take an hour or two to fully pressurize the water tank.

“Herman Shorty, chairman of the Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management, is meeting with the repair crew to ensure the water will be safe to consume,” Whitehair said.

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