



Navajo Nation dedicates Little Singer Community School with Birdsprings community and Washington delegation

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PHOTO: Little Singer Community School Board President Leslie Williams cuts the ribbon at the new Little Singer Community School facility in Birdsprings, Arizona on Oct. 28, 2020. Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr., federal officials, construction personnel and community leaders were present for the ceremony and dedication of the

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation officials joined the Birdsprings community Wednesday for the dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Little Singer Community School completed earlier this year. Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr. (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Birdsprings, Leupp, Tolani Lake), White House policy advisors, federal Administration officials, Little Singer Community School administrators and community members held the ceremonial opening Oct. 28.

“The Little Singer Community School and Birdsprings community showcase Indian self-determination in education in the way community elders and traditional leaders came together to make the school one of the first Bureau of Indian Education contract schools. From there, the school met the standards and contractual obligations in order for the federal government to award the funds for the locally-controlled school to expand with this investment,” said Delegate Walker, a former member and president of the school board. “It was great to have White House representatives present to show them we take initiative and can successfully operate a school here on the Navajo Nation.”

The new \$28 million-dollar Little Singer Community School is located six miles south of the Birdsprings Chapter House. Etta Shirley, principal of the Little Singer Community School, indicated the new facility will serve over 100 students ranging from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade.

“My work is dedicated to our kids and their families. I always want the best for them,” said Shirley. “They’d go to other schools in other communities and ask when they could get a new one, and we got it for them as a team. I know the students will be overjoyed to have a new school they can take pride in, and the day is coming when this pandemic will be over. We can’t wait for them to come back.”

School Board President Leslie Williams said the board submitted its first application for a new facility to the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) in 2004 and in 2012, the request was moved up on their school renovation priority list. The new school finished construction earlier this year and a temporary certificate of occupancy was issued just prior to the dedication.

Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs with the US Department of the Interior Tara Sweeney also celebrated the opening of the long-awaited Little Singer Community School. Sweeney said the investment is an important part in developing future leaders that Birdsprings will grow from the school.

“I would like to extend my gratitude to the Navajo Nation Council and the governing school board for their dedication to this community,” said Sweeney. “I want to recognize Principal Shirley for her heart and drive to be an example in this community, we need more leaders like her.”

Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the Domestic Policy Council Jennie Lichter spoke with those in attendance and emphasized the White House’s commitment to, “Keep America’s First Peoples First.”

“We learned a lot about your history and your culture. Little Singer Community School will help raise children in that tradition, as well as give them the educational foundation they need to prosper in the modern world,” said Lichter.

Construction for the Little Singer Community School came from the BIE and was administered by the school board and administration. Keyah Construction, Inc., a B-01 and A licensed general contractor in Arizona, was awarded the federally-funded contract to complete the construction.

Harry Singer, president of Keyah Construction Inc., said the original concept for the school began as early as the 1960s by his late grandfather, named Hátááłii Yázhí, or Little Singer.

“The first big celebration for the original school was held in in 1982. The school grew and modular buildings were added here and there with the campus growing as it needed to,” said Singer. “When they finally got funding to build a new school, we were fortunate enough to have a full construction company with the bonding capacity. All workers, including the project managers and laborers, were all 100 percent Navajo from Birdsprings and surrounding communities.”

Singer also acknowledged the contributions of subcontractors from surrounding communities that helped complete the more than 2,000 square-foot facility and the Salt Lake City-based architect for the project, Robert Eaton with Eaton Architecture, Inc.

Construction was overseen by Project Manager Jeremiah LaMesa under direction and guidance from the school board.

Deputy Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services Eric Hargan expressed his appreciation for the Birdsprings community’s involvement, expressing the importance of safe facilities during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Hargan shared that Native Americans are 5.3 times more likely to contract SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19. Hargan indicated his optimism about the school’s investment into software and state-of-the-art information technology equipment to promote remote learning.

Williams indicated the school is an integral first step for other community initiatives, including a three-phase power line plan and increased access to water services. Williams added the community hopes to see an all-weather highway to the school on Navajo Route 71, which is currently a dirt road.

“It’s been a long time coming with such a large, new school. I believe this is an historic day in Indian Country,” said Williams.

Also in attendance was 23rd Navajo Nation Council Delegate Tom Chee, Birdsprings community member Effie Williams, Tsidii To’ii Veterans Organization members Richard David, Wayne Begay, Albert James and others. Federal representatives included, Office of Justice Programs Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Katharine Sullivan, Indian Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development Mark Cruz, Assistant to the President and Director of White House Intergovernmental Affairs Douglas Hoelscher, Department of Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Benefits Paul R. Lawrence, Department of Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan, Indian Health Service (IHS) Director RADM Michael D. Weahkee and Navajo Area Indian Health Services deputy director CAPT Brian K. Johnson.

Little Singer Community School is a Tribally Controlled School that serves grades K-6, and Principal Shirley indicated that her teachers were excited to resume remote instruction with new technology and facilities.



PHOTO: Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs with the US Department of the Interior Tara Sweeney (center), Assistant to the President and Director of White House Intergovernmental Affairs Douglas Hoelscher (left) and Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the Domestic Policy Council Jennie Lichter were in attendance at the dedication ceremony of the new Little Singer Community School held in the Runnin’ Colts Gymnasium Dome.

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