

## New senior citizens center unites young and old in Tsaile/Wheatfields



The new senior citizens center for Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter brought in a large number of Navajo elders for the opening celebration on October 24, 2012. The Navajo elders were treated to live entertainment courtesy of Dine' Bi Olta students in Ft. Defiance and free lunch. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

The wind howled and dust swirled as the Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter celebrated the grand opening of their new senior citizens center on Oct. 24, 2012.

Elders from the community filled the white tent pitched outside the facility, along with tribal officials, county officials and members of the media.

Navajo Division of Transportation Director Paulson Chaco said the project was a good example of tribal programs working together for the benefit of the Navajo people.

"NDOT used Fuel Excise Tax funding to construct the parking lot, including the electrical infrastructure for the lot," Chaco said.

The senior citizens of the Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter now have a facility to gather in the community for kinship, relaxation and celebration, he added.

The FET provides funding to projects across the Navajo Nation, in all five agencies, via the Navajo Nation Road Fund.

Applicants can apply for NNRFF to receive assistance in the areas of pothole repairs, blading/graveling of dirt roads, culvert replacement, drainage and maintenance, traffic signal/streetlights, chip sealing, other maintenance, feasibility studies, surveys, environmental assessments, archaeological assessments, planning, engineering, design, access roads, parking lots, school bus route improve-

ments, and matching funds projects.

The Navajo Nation Council enacted the FET to defray necessary governmental expenses incurred in providing for the public welfare. Currently, there is a tax of 18 cents on every gallon of gasoline sold on the Navajo Nation.

The parking lot was funded by the FET for FY 2004 and clearly illustrates that NDOT was an early supporter of the new senior citizens center.

The new building is 4,957 square feet and features a dining area with a fireplace, kitchen, three office spaces, activity area, crafts area, two -bathrooms (with showers), file room, laundry room, and three storage rooms.

Completion of the facility was made possible with funding and services from NDOT, Navajo Abandoned Mine Lands, Design and Engineering Services, Capital Improvement Office, LAM Corporation, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, and the chapter.

The stakeholders in the facility were NDOT, which provided \$316,448 for the parking lot construction; Navajo AML with a contribution of \$300,000 for the facility; NTUA contributed \$75,000 for underground utilities, and the Navajo Nation, which contributed \$1,307,218.24 for construction.

Zane James, president of Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter, said the vision for the 7.8-acre land tract is nearly complete.

“The senior center is the focal point and our chapter’s goal is language and cultural retention. The center is located next to the Head Start, so the elders can have interaction with the children,” James said.

Also slated for development are a hogan, multi-purpose building and daycare center.

In progress for over a decade, seed money for the senior citizens center was originally planted by the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council, which appropriated \$1,250,000 for planning, designing and construction of the facility.

James said the chapter built the Head Start center first, which had cost savings of \$195,346.41 that was carried

Another stakeholder said multiple funding sources brought the project to fruition.

George Hubbard, project manager with DES agreed the project held special significance because of its benefit to the Navajo elders in the community.

“We worked through the winter and only stopped twice,” Hubbard said.

The power line to the building was the only challenge, he said, because community members did not want to see a tangled mess of power lines crisscrossing through the area.

The issue was resolved with the decision to bury the lines underground.

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over to construction costs of the senior citizens center.

All told, a little over \$2 million was used to construct the senior citizens center, which tackled funding through various stakeholders.

One such investor said the benefit to Navajo senior citizens only added to the value of the project.

Marrietta Jensen, program and project specialist for Navajo AML said funding for the senior center was part of the FY 2011 funding cycle.

In 2011, Navajo AML funded seven projects under their Public Facilities Projects for a total of \$2.4 million for construction in areas of reservation impacted by mining.

“We’re just trying to assist with infrastructure across the Navajo Nation to communities most directly impacted by mining,” Jensen said. “It was good to see grandma and grandpa benefit.”

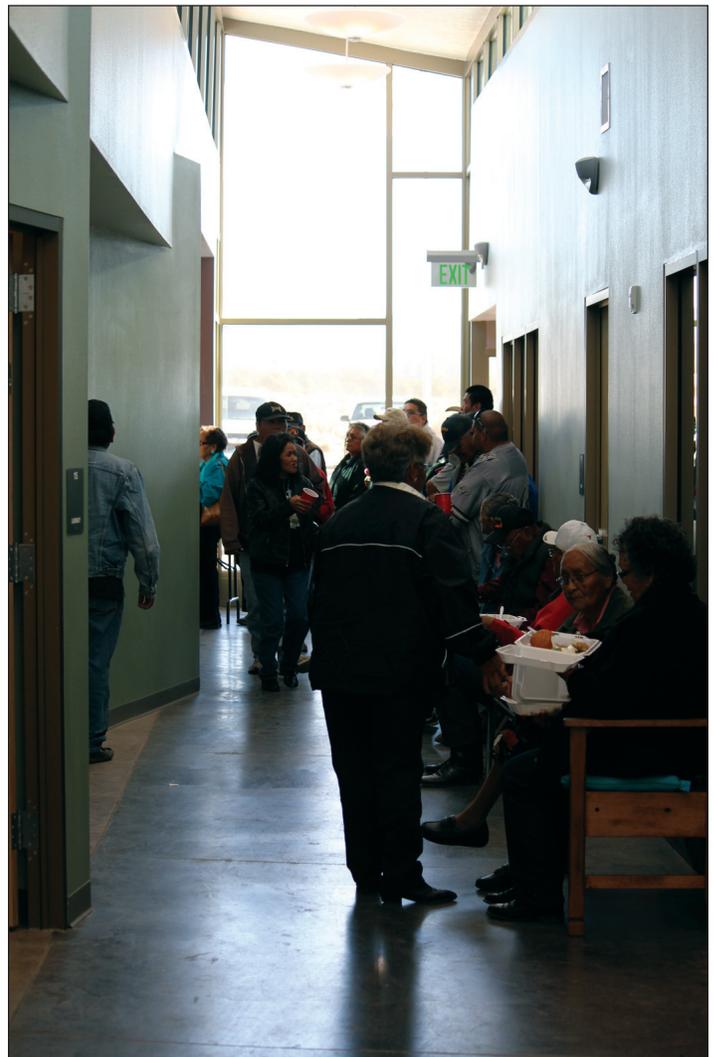
can produce and accomplish a lot on the reservation for the communities,” Hubbard said.

That kind of cooperative synergy is needed throughout the Navajo Nation, James said, so projects like the new senior citizens center can be brought to completion.

“We want to retain our language and culture in the Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter. We wanted to give our elders a unique building with natural ties to the community,” he said.

The high vaulted ceilings of the new building reflect the aesthetics of Canyon de Chelly, while the eastern side of the building speaks to Tse Ziin Bi To’, or Black Rock Pinnacle.

“During the blessing, the sun rose directly behind Black Rock Pinnacle and sunlight shone directly into the hallway,” James said. “Everything fell into place, like it was all meant to be.”



The high vaulted ceilings of the senior citizen center highway was an aesthetic design mimicing the edifice of Canyon de Chelly. Senior citizens from the community had input on the design of the facility. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The \$2 million senior citizen facility in Tsaile has been in development for over a decade. Navajo elders proudly toured the facility and ate lunch next to the fireplace. The celebration was a chance to visit old friends and catch up on news in the community. (Photo by Rick Abasta)