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President Shelly tours Hooghan Hozho', announces plans for veterans housing



President Shelly toured Hooghan Hozho' and said the Nation is planning a similar complex. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

GALLUP, N.M.—Creating opportunities to end homelessness is the mission of Community Area Resources Enterprise, Inc. of Gallup.

The non-profit organization is also known as CARE 66 and is dedicated to providing affordable housing opportunities to homeless people. Their belief is that by providing opportunities for people to improve work and life skills, they will become self-sufficient.

On Feb. 9, President Shelly toured the \$8.4 million Hooghan Hozho' and Liberty Hotel development in Gallup. First Lady Martha Shelly and executive staff assistant Carl Smith joined the president, plus staff from CARE 66.

The mixed income family housing development is located at 201 East Coal Ave., near downtown Gallup and stands in stark contrast to other buildings in the area. The three-story building features bright colors and bold architectural design.

Phase one of the project is for

the apartment complex and phase two will be for construction of the hotel.

Navajo Housing Authority provided \$7.1 million for the project. A multitude of other funding sources contributed more than \$1.3 million for the complex.

There will be a total of 44 units for rent at Hooghan Hozho' for Navajo families in need of housing. Construction began in Aug. 2013 and the project will be completed in June 2015.

According to CARE 66 statistics, the median income for a household in McKinley County is \$25,005 and the median income for a family is \$26,806. The per capita income for the county is \$9,872.

About 31.9 percent of families and 36.1 percent of the population are below the poverty line, including 42.3 percent of those under age 18 and 31.5 percent for those 65 and over. The county's per capita income makes it one of the poorest counties in the U.S.

President Shelly said the building was "exceptional" and said the Navajo Nation would like to pursue a similar apartment complex in Window Rock for veterans.

"Our veterans are in dire need for housing and this development is an excellent model that we can follow," President Shelly said. "Carl Smith worked for CARE 66 and he is our point person for our veterans housing initiative."

Thomas Gifford Architect, LLC of Santa Fe provided the building design. Pavilion Construction provided the construction of the building.

The apartment complex will consist of 11 one-bedroom, one-bathroom units, 30 two-bedroom, one-bathroom units and three three-bedroom, two-bathroom units.

Hooghan Hozho' also features a secured courtyard, resident facilities and offices for the property manager. The units feature innovative floor plans with balconies.

Residents will have access to an onsite laundry facility, community computer rooms, onsite parking, a central recreation area and onsite social services.

Sanjay Choudhrie, executive director of CARE 66 said future plans include construction of micro apartments for the homeless at 100 square feet per unit, similar to their current program at the Lexington Hotel.

"We have 21 people at the Lexington Hotel and 175 people on the waiting list. We'd like to build (a hotel) so we can get people off the streets," he said.

Choudhrie said they only accept tenants who are sober and that CARE 66 is the only Native American model in the country that providing housing first to tenants, followed by social services and other forms of assistance to get the homeless on their feet.

Smith said the Navajo Nation has plans to construct a similar apartment complex in Window Rock for veterans in need of housing.

"We have over 10,000 veterans on the Navajo Nation and more than 400 are homeless," Smith said. "We want to build a HUD rental unit with support

services."

Identifying funding sources for the project is the first step and Smith will approach NHA, the Navajo Nation Council and others for seed money to fund architecture and engineering.

"The rental units will provide transitional housing for our veterans for at least four to six years, until they are able to establish homeownership for themselves," Smith said.

In the meantime, Hooghan Hozho' will address the large population of working Navajo families in need of affordable housing in Gallup.

President Shelly said there's been a lot of misinformation about NHA in the media recently and the fact that they invested \$7.1 million for Hooghan Hozho' should prove they are spending money for housing.

"They're changing how they're spending money and how they do business," President Shelly said.

Choudhrie agreed and said, "Most of our projects have some level of NHA funding. We couldn't have done any of the things we've done without NHA. They've been a great partner for the last seven years."

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