

Veterans housing program continues building new homes, employing Navajo veterans

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 18 November 2022 06:25



Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Navajo Veterans Administration Director James Zwierlein visited the construction site of a new three-bedroom home that is currently being built in the community of Nenahnezad, N.M., for a Navajo veteran and his three children on Oct. 27. This is one of at least eight homes for veterans that are in progress through the Navajo Veterans Housing Program.

At each of the sites, Navajo veterans are employed as construction workers even if they have no prior experience in the construction field. Veterans with no prior construction experience have also been hired to be apprentices under experienced workers to allow them to learn new skills while earning an income.

On Sept. 6, Jonathan Nez presented the key to a new hogan-style home to Diné U.S. Army veteran, Kee C. Nez and his wife, in Teecnospos, Ariz. The veteran lost his previous home to a fire a few years ago and had lived with family members since. The home was fully funded and constructed through the Navajo Veterans Housing Program.

In 2013, former Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd introduced legislation to provide funding specifically for the construction of new homes for Navajo veterans. Jonathan Nez acknowledged Shepherd's achievement in setting the foundation for the current program. But he did mention that there were problems with the initial program.

"Once those homes began to be built years ago, there were deficiencies in the housing policy that left some veterans with homes that were not connected to basic utilities and without appliances," Jonathan Nez said.

Veterans housing program continues building new homes, employing Navajo veterans

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 18 November 2022 06:25

Jonathan Nez said that Zwierlein helped work with lawmakers to change the policies so that all new homes are required to be connected to water, wastewater, electricity, and fully-equipped with new appliances before a veteran moves into the home.

“This drives up the cost of each new home, but we now have high-quality homes being built that have running water, electricity, and all of the basic amenities for our veterans to be comfortable in their new homes as soon as they move in,” Jonathan Nez said.

Each home has a solid concrete foundation that includes two to five bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom(s), and new appliances with electricity, plumbing, and sewage system installed. The homes are also ADA accessible with widened doorways, safety handrails, walk-in shower, doorway ramp, and other features to accommodate the elderly veterans.

In July, Jonathan Nez and the 24th Navajo Nation Council approved an additional \$50 million through the American Rescue Plan Act to fund the construction of more homes for veterans. The Navajo Nation Fiscal Recovery Fund Office approved the budget packet to authorize the implementation of the \$50 million. With the shortage and high demand of construction materials around the world, securing building materials, utility parts, and other equipment continues to create challenges and increase the cost of each home, but Zwierlein and his team continue to work with suppliers to prevent setbacks as much as possible.

In addition to constructing new homes, the Navajo Veterans Administration is also overseeing repairs and improvements to homes that were constructed for Navajo veterans between 2014 and 2017.

In 2017, the Office of the Auditor General conducted an audit of the Veterans Housing Program. The findings indicated that several veteran homes were not in livable and safe conditions. An inspection of randomly completed homes concluded that the homes did not meet safety and quality standards. The homes were not constructed by the current contractor.

Staff Reports