Contact: Jan-Mikael Patterson
Senior Public Information Officer
Navajo AML/UMTRA Department
Tele: 928-871-6982
patterson_jm@frontier.com
www.aml.navajo-nsn.gov

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"It is a dream come true for Tonalea residents"

TONALEA, Ariz. – A total of 19 homes along a seven mile stretch within the community of Rat Springs, near Wildcat Peak, will be electrified for the first time.

On Friday morning community members came together as NTUA, Navajo AML, Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, past and current leaders celebrated the installation of the first 40 foot electric pole installed on the Former Bennett Freeze Area, as part of the groundbreaking ceremony.

"Since the Bennett Freeze had been lifted this is the first pole that has been installed," said Leslie Dele, former Council Delegate and community member. "This community is unique because they are affected by the Navajo-Hopi Partitioned Lands, Navajo Partitioned Lands, Bennett Freeze, and Big Navajo. This community is affected by those four public laws."

In the past, the chapter would have gotten this project going if they asked the Hopi's, Dele said, but even that was difficult in part due to the long history of the Navajo and Hopi tribes.

There were a lot of Navajos that were relocated to this area, Dele said, adding that they were abruptly relocated into an area where utilities were hard to obtain.

The wait was long and it showed as community members came together to celebrate with a community potluck.

"Everyone in the community is happy about this," said Colbert Dayzie, vice president. "They all got together and are bringing food to feed the people that are here. They're very excited about this and this project means so much to them."

The community has waited 40 years for this day, said Darryl Jim, Chapter President. "The people here are very excited about this. This has been a long time coming."

Jim noted that this is one of several power line extension projects and they plan to continue moving forward with future plans for many other residents to get power to their homes.

For Albert and Stella Dandy having the electricity connection means appliances. The family currently has solar panels that was purchased through Hopi Solar in Kykotsmovi, Ariz. The problem with that is getting the batteries needed which can be a hit & miss when they travel to Flagstaff.

“It’s only 3,000 watts,” said Albert, 54, of Rat Springs. “We can’t use the microwave, coffee makers or refrigerator. They take up a lot of the power.”

“We would have to store our meats at our son’s home in Inscription House and that’s a drive too,” said Stella, 53. “It takes a lot for us to drive over just to get our meat.”

The Dandy’s moved back to the reservation in 1994 and since then they were told it would take five years to get an electrical hook-up and they were told that every five years. Through the chapter solar panels were provided for members of the community but the Dandy’s went and purchased their own solar equipment hoping that it would make living on the reservation easier.

Not long after moving the family got connected to water.

“We used to haul five gallon buckets of water every day from our storage tank to the house to use,” Albert explained. “When we got the water line it made it easier. Now we have electricity coming.

“Now we just have to do something about the road,” added Stella. The road to their home is rugged and gets worse with the weather conditions. Aside from red sand the family and community has to endure rugged and rigid roads due to red sandstone. Even when graded, the sandstone still makes for a rugged drive.

“Our kids are now moving back to the reservation,” Stella said. “Our daughter is getting her home built and moving back home. They like it out here. The grandkids too. They like how quiet it is. Now that these (amenities) are available our kids are looking to move back home.”

For elderly couple Bahe and Zonnie Marie Wilson having electricity will make living at home much easier as well.

“Generators ayóó daahiiljh (translated from Navajo to “…are too expensive),” said Zonnie. She noted that generators are expensive to purchase as well as the oil and fuel that adds up. The generator would take up about three gallons per four hours and they would have to refuel. Then there is the maintenance that adds to the expenses.

Once a generator breaks down it takes time to have them repaired so another has to be purchased to keep things going a home.

“Díí power-line extension shił yaa’át’eeh,” Zonnie said, approving of the extension project.

NTUA crews and community members all gathered at the site of the groundbreaking ceremony where a 40 foot electric pole installation would take place.

A total of 25 people gathered at the site where they gathered in a circle and dug into the soil ceremoniously to get the project underway. This was a historic moment for many because this is the first pole installed since the Bennett Freeze was lifted.

A Digger truck was used to drill six feet deep into the soft red sand. The excitement was strewn across the faces of elders and children alike as the electric was hoisted up and placed into the hole.

Once the pole was placed community members applauded and cheered as NTUA workers continued to place the pole.

After the celebration ended and people retreated back to the chapter house to eat, Dele walked up to the pole and embraced it with a hug.

“Aoo’ nizhoniyé’ éí (translated, “Yes, this is beautiful),” Dele said. “Grandpa, your dream came true.”

With that said, a community’s dream came true.

NTUA officials said the project would take four months to complete. The total cost estimate of the project is $423,338.22. Navajo AML is funding $400,000 through the Public Facility Projects (PFP) funds, with additional funds from Tonalea Chapter ($101,735.87), and Navajo-Hopi Partitioned Lands ($48,960).

Navajo AML Reclamation/Navajo Uranium Mill Tailings Remediation Action operates under the Navajo Division of Natural Resources and administers PFP funding to assist chapters with community improvements, infrastructure, and public facility development. Communities directly impacted by past and present mining activities are eligible to apply for the $400 thousand three-year grant for community priority projects.

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