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NEWS**Home for Christmas**

Families prepare for first Christmas in homes they helped build

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The sound of banging hammers was replaced with cheers of joy as eleven low-income families received approval to move into new Reedley homes they helped build.

Over the past nine months, members of the families put in nearly 16,000 hours of labor during construction of their homes and those of their neighbors. This week, the families were awarded certificates of completion from representatives of Self-Help Enterprises, and the USDA Rural Development, represented by Rural Development state director Dr. Glenda Humiston.



Cheryl Lingo / The Exponent Noe, Frances, Maria, and Alfonso Agabo said they hope to be moved in to their new home before Christmas. The Agabo family and ten others are the first of 44 who helped build their homes with a USDA low-income loan.

Humiston—who was appointed by President Obama—said \$1.4 million in USDA loans, ranging from \$97,000 to \$145,000, helped make the project a reality for the local families.

The homes are three or four bedrooms, ranging from 1,205 to 1,350 square feet, with two car garages, interior laundry rooms, front porches and covered rear patios.

The eleven homes complete phase 1 of 44 homes to be built in the Orchard Estates II subdivision on S. Frankwood Avenue. The remaining homes will be completed by May of 2010, according to Dirk Holkeboer, New Homes Program Director for S.H.E.

USDA Rural Development's Self-Help Housing Program makes loans to low income applicants who commit to a minimum of 30 hours per week on the job site, utilizing their own labor as "sweat equity", and reducing construction costs.

Self-Help Enterprises, based in Visalia, has roots in the community. Ralph Rosedale, a Reedley resident and member of the Mennonite Brethren Church, served as the first chairman of the board when S.H.E. was formed more than 40 years ago.

Rosedale said a Quaker organization formed a committee to explore the needs of rural farming communities like Reedley. Rosedale and Orange Cove farmer Don Schroder served on that committee. The concept evolved to be S.H.E., which originated the mutual self help home building concept with the USDA in 1965. Today there are more than 100 such agencies nationwide, including an east Texas program that Rosedale and his wife started about five years ago.

Rosedale is active again with the Visalia S.H.E., serving on the board of directors.

Pastor Dennis Fast and associate pastor Marlin Hiatt also attended the award ceremony with Rosedale. About 20 members of the church spent a Saturday working on the Reedley project, according to Hiatt. He says the church plans more work days for the other 33 homes under

construction.

The City of Reedley worked with S.H.E. to help the homeowners navigate the planning and building phases, including working after hours for the final inspection of the homes.

City Planner David Brletic said the City was cognizant of the fact that the homes were being built by people not accustomed to the process.

"[Building] has been the most help through patient inspection services. Remember these homes are being built by regular people with no building experience."

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