

The Reedley Exponent

Belief helps family get home

OC family living in broken-down house to get a new home

By Jacob Rayburn
jacob@midvalleypublishing.com

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For decades, a small two-story house has stood in the 100 block of Center Street in Orange Cove. The house is in disrepair with a list of failings that make it no longer safe for the Zavala family.

In need of a new home, one is coming to the Zavalas because of the assistance of Self-Help Enterprises and the determination Leticia Zavala.

It started with a flyer from Self-Help enterprises in the mail.

The group's housing rehabilitation effort looks for candidates in need of emergency repair or a complete rehabilitation.

Eduardo Zavala was skeptical of what he thought was a scam.

Sonia Sanchez with Self-Help Enterprises translated as he explained that his family had experienced identity theft before and he was afraid about giving personal information to anyone.

On the flyer was an 800 number, which he thought was a red flag.

"At first I didn't believe it," Eduardo said.

"You get spam mail to sign up for things. I didn't think it was actually going to happen."

But then another flyer came and this time his wife, Leticia Zavala, latched on to the hope that this was something different.

She called the number while working in the fields away from her husband.

That was when program director Susan Atkins entered the story. At first, the Zavala's didn't have enough equity to qualify, but determination set in when Atkins saw the house.



Jacob Rayburn / The Times Mayor Pro Tem Victor Lopez, Eduardo Zavala, Leticia Zavala, and Melissa Valdez and Steve Santana with Self-Help Enterprises, break ground with ceremonial golden shovels. The Zavalas will get watch from their current home as their new house is built on their property.

"After I saw the condition of the house, I became insistent we make this happen," Atkins said. "We found grants and got a loan approved by the city."

Atkins said once the house is built, the Zavalas will have no new payments to make on it unless they move.

Atkins said the family is still paying off a mortgage on their current house.

The new house will be built on the same lot as the existing house—a small, two-story structure tucked into one small square of a large, mostly bare lot.

There is enough room, in fact, that the new house—which will be a single story with four bedrooms and two bathrooms—will be built in front of the old.

When it is done, the existing house will be demolished.

A groundbreaking ceremony on March 5 was held to celebrate the new start for the Zavalas.

Mayor Gabriel Jimenez said he can remember the family that lived in the house when he was a child. It's a house that holds many memories, he said, but new memories are needed.

"It's just a true blessing to have a program like this," Jimenez said about Self-Help Enterprises. "To build a new home would be impossible for this family."

Doing the work will be a company called Speedy Gonzalez Construction, which hopes to have the home done in a few months.

Contractor Antonio Gonzalez said he is excited for the family, especially Leticia Zavala after she fought so hard for the house.

"They'll get to see all stages of the home going up," Gonzalez said. "I think that's pretty neat."

After the ceremony, the Zavalas brought out an ice chest with drinks for everyone, eager to say thank you.

When asked about what it will be like in his new house, Eduardo Zavala said he is happy for the space.

"I'm very happy and excited," Zavala said. "I'm happy I'll have more space, because this house is small for my family. I already picture myself in the new home."

For Leticia—the woman who didn't think it was too good to be true—she thinks about her new home every night.

Her description brought tears to translator Sonia Sanchez's eyes as she described the scene.

"I take the drawing of the floor plan up to my bed and lay it out," Leticia said. "I imagine what I will do in every room."