

10 rural families to help build each other's homes

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By John Rieping



Local officials and members of 10 families turn over a golden shovel-full of dirt at a ceremonial groundbreaking Wednesday in the rural Parksdale subdivision. The families will help build their own homes with aid from Self-Help Enterprises and USDA Rural Development. (John Rieping).

Ten families, Self-Help Enterprises, and Madera County Supervisor Max Rodriguez marked the planned construction of 10 new homes in the rural Parksdale subdivision with a ceremonial groundbreaking Wednesday morning.

However, the families won't be spectators as these homes are built. They'll be pitching in as part of a mutual self-help housing program, which exists thanks to a partnership between Self-Help Enterprises and USDA Rural Development.

Participants must provide more than 65 percent of the construction labor for their new single-family homes, according to Sonia Sanchez of Self-Help Enterprises. In addition, each homeowner must contribute at least 40 hours per week toward completing each home for group members.

Over an 8-12 month period, groups of 9-12 families pour foundations, frame homes, install electrical wiring, hang doors and windows, lay tile and paint.

The "sweat equity" of labor hours are used as a down payment for the new home to reduce costs for those who could not otherwise afford a home.

Finances were the biggest obstacle that kept program participants Florentino Valdez and his wife from owning a home of their own. "It's hard to keep the money to make the payments you know ... especially in farming ... You keep a \$1,000 a month and, man, you got a lot of money because you spend more than you make," he said.

The newest homes will range from 1,210 to 1,350 square feet and feature three or four bedrooms, two baths, covered patios and two-car garages.

The first self-help homes in Parksdale were built in 1970, and the construction of 10 new homes will raise the subdivision's tally of such homes to 113. An additional 30 homes are planned for construction in the current subdivision phase by early 2018.

The choice of Parksdale for these homes was no accident. "One of the challenges in Madera County has always been to create housing opportunities, particularly for farmworker families," said Tom Collishaw, president and CEO of Self-Help Enterprises, "as there's been very few areas outside of incorporated cities, which are just Madera and Chowchilla, where infrastructure exists to actually create housing opportunities."

Self-Help Enterprises developed its mutual self-help housing program in 1965, and since then it has helped more than 6,200 families in the San Joaquin Valley.

Those interested in the self-help program may call 802-1628 or visit www.selfhelpenterprises.org for information and to apply. The main qualifications are an acceptable credit status (possibly including no credit), stable income from employment and other sources, a qualifying low income and either U.S. citizenship or permanent residency.