

THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

Self-Help celebrating Woodlake housing project

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By: The Recorder

10 families will build their own affordable homes

Self-Help Enterprises will hold a groundbreaking ceremony to recognize 10 families who are beginning construction on their new affordable homes through the organization's mutual self-help housing program.

"The 10 families are thankful this holiday season for the opportunity to start construction on their home — the home that will be completed next year in time to celebrate Thanksgiving 2018 with loved ones," said Sonia Sanchez, communication and outreach specialist with Self-Help Enterprises.

Sanchez said the groundbreaking event is set for 10 a.m. on Thursday, Dec. 7 at Self-Help Enterprises' subdivision on the corner of North Valencia Boulevard and Wutchumna Avenue in Woodlake. Sanchez said a ceremonial "turning of the dirt" will commemorate the occasion.

City of Woodlake officials and community partners, Sanchez said, will be in attendance to share their support for affordable homeownership. Sanchez said the City of Woodlake is home to many agricultural workers and other hardworking families who have been effectively shut out of the home purchase market due to lack of new construction or existing homes on the market.

To address the demand from the community for affordable housing, Sanchez said the City of Woodlake partners with Self-Help Enterprises to facilitate housing programs offering diverse housing options. These programs, Sanchez said, include the First-Time Homebuyer program that helps subsidize mortgages to keep mortgage payments affordable for new homeowners, the Housing Rehabilitation program, which offers home repair and renovations that keep low-income families in their existing home, and the Self-Help program that gives families the opportunity to build their own home along with their neighbors.

Self-Help Enterprises, Sanchez said, is also working with the City of Woodlake to preserve and rehabilitate an 11-unit rental property on Danielle Way. She said the occupied units are home to tenants currently living in units with deferred maintenance needs. She added that these 11 units will be brought up to the current building code to address health and safety concerns, energy efficiency, and other needed upgrades.

"We strongly believe that a decent home is one of the basic building blocks for families and for a thriving community," said Tom Collishaw, President and CEO of Self-Help Enterprises. "Through our ongoing partnership with the City of Woodlake, we have created homeownership and affordable housing opportunities for hundreds of low- and moderate-income families. These families now have the security and stability that comes with having a safe and decent place to call home."

Rudy Mendoza, the mayor of Woodlake, said he is proud of the long-standing relationship between the City of Woodlake and Self-Help Enterprises as they both continue to provide a piece of the American Dream for local families.

"Homeownership at Valencia Heights is made possible by good governance and collaboration between public and private partnerships, Mendoza said.

Sanchez said the new Self-Help housing subdivision, known as Valencia Heights, will add a total of 70 new, affordable homes on a 15-acre subdivision that features a neighborhood park. The completion of the 70 homes, Sanchez said, will bring a total of 257 homes to Woodlake since the first Self-Help houses were constructed in 1967.

Sanchez said the homes are built under the USDA Rural Development mutual Self-Help housing program, with homeowners providing over 65 percent of the construction labor. She said over a nine to 12 month period, groups of

eight to 12 families work together on nearly every aspect of the homes with direction from a skilled construction supervisor.

Each homeowner, Sanchez said, contributes a minimum of 40 hours per week toward completion of all homes in the group and all the homes must be completed before any family can move in. These labor hours, or “sweat equity,” Sanchez said, are used as the down payment on their new home, resulting in affordable monthly payments for a home they otherwise could not afford.

Sanchez said the homes, ranging from 1,240 to 1,480 square feet, feature three or four bedrooms, two baths covered patios, and two-car garages. She said all homes are Energy Star-certified, reducing their energy consumption, helping protect the environment, and ensuring the homeowners pay less on their monthly utility bills. Sanchez said this cost savings also helps families save for other important expenses like healthy food purchases and education.

“Owning a home is part of accomplishing the American Dream and receiving an excellent education is part as well,” said Drew Sorensen, superintendent of the Woodlake Unified School District. “This combination of homeownership and education is an exciting opportunity for the community of Woodlake and the Woodlake Unified School District. This partnership bodes well for the future of the children living in these new homes. Woodlake Unified School District is proud to be a supporter of this endeavor.”

More than housing, Sanchez said Self-Help Enterprises provides homeownership education, financial fitness counseling, and home maintenance training. Sanchez said historically this training has made Self-Help homeowners among the most successful long-term homeowners of any program in the nation.

Since 1965, Sanchez said Self-Help Enterprises has helped more than 6,200 families in the San Joaquin Valley build their own homes and achieve the dream of homeownership.

To learn more about Self-Help Enterprises, visit www.selfhelpenterprises.org.