

# THE FOOTHILLS SUN-GAZETTE

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## Ten families take part in groundbreaking for new Self-Help Enterprises' subdivisions in Woodlake

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By: Sun-Gazette

Woodlake— Jose Reynoso has spent many Thanksgivings with his family in Woodlake over the years, and next year the 44-year-old will get to host the feast at his own home. Jose, along with his wife Corinne and three children, were among 10 families to turn dirt in a ceremonial groundbreaking for Self-Help Enterprises newest neighborhood in Woodlake on Dec. 7.

"We live in a small rental place now but we don't want to leave town because we love Woodlake and the small town feel," Jose said. "And now we won't have to because we will own our own home."

Jose will be a third generation Self-Help homeowner after helping his parents and both of his uncles build their homes through the non-profit homebuilder. His wife Corinne, 46, said she was excited about owning their first home because it would give stability to their three children – Marissa, 11, Mario, 5, and Joseph, 4.

"Our kids are excited to have their own rooms and neighbor kids to play with," Corinne said about the four bedroom, three bathroom home in the Valencia Heights subdivision on the corner of N. Valencia Blvd. and Wutchumna Ave. in Woodlake.

The new self-help housing subdivision 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 will bring a total of 257 homes to Woodlake since the first self-help houses were constructed in 1967.

"I am proud of the long-standing relationship between the city of Woodlake and Self-Help Enterprises as we 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," said Woodlake Mayor Rudy Mendoza.

The homes are built under the USDA Rural Development mutual self-help housing program, with homeowners providing over 65 percent of the construction labor. Over the next nine to 12 months, the 10 families will work together on nearly every aspect of the homes with direction from a skilled construction supervisor. Each homeowner 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", are used as the down payment on their new home, resulting in affordable monthly payments for a home they otherwise could not afford. The homes, ranging from 1,240 to 1,480 square feet, feature three or four bedrooms, two baths, covered patios, and two-car garages. 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. 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. This combination of homeownership and education is an exciting opportunity for the community of Woodlake and the Woodlake Unified School District," said Drew Sorensen, Superintendent of 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."

The new homes built by families in Woodlake are in addition to another 460 homes that Self-Help Enterprises helped through its rehabilitation efforts. Self-Help Enterprises is currently working with the City of Woodlake to preserve and rehabilitate an 11-unit rental property on Danielle Way. The occupied units are home to tenants currently living in units with deferred maintenance needs. 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."

The City of Woodlake is home to many agricultural workers and other hardworking families, like the Ochoas, 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, the City of Woodlake partners with Self-Help Enterprises to facilitate housing programs offering diverse housing options. These programs 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.

"The California dream of homeownership has become a mirage in most parts of the state," said Supervisor Steve Worthley, who represents Woodlake on the Tulare County Board of Supervisors. "But the California dream is alive and well in Tulare County and the central part of California."

More than housing, Self-Help Enterprises provides homeownership education, financial fitness counseling, and home maintenance training. Historically this training has made self-help homeowners among the most successful long-term homeowners of any program in the nation. Since 1965, 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.