

MID VALLEY TIMES

9 families move into homes they helped build

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Nine Orosi families, participants in the Mutual Self-Help Housing program sponsored by Self-Help Enterprises (SHE), spent 10 months building their homes

OROSI – On June 8, 2023, nine Orosi families officially took ownership of the homes they spent the last 10 months helping to build.

The nine are part of the Orosi 11, a group of families who worked with each other building houses. There are 27 other families building homes in the subdivision, which is located off Avenue 413 in Orosi. Each family spent roughly 1,600 hours on construction. According to Tom Collishaw, SHE president and CEO, community involvement is the key to the project's success.

"No one [in the group] moves in until all homes are completed," Collishaw said.

Ten other Orosi groups, roughly 100 families, built homes in the area. Collishaw said four other groups are building homes in the subdivision.

Maria Gomez's family was one of the nine families who were feted that morning.

"I always wanted to build my own home," Gomez said as she addressed SHE employees and other guests. "I prayed and prayed we would be selected. These past 14 months I have learned the meaning of hard work."

Maria Gallegos Herrera, California State Director for USDA Rural Development, was on hand to present each family a certificate of achievement and the keys to their new homes.

"I grew up in the city of Orange Cove and here in Orosi," Herrera said. "Homeownership has a special place in my heart. My mother was able to purchase her home through a USDA loan, so I know firsthand what affects our programs have on residents such as you."

SHE has been helping families find housing since 1965. Over that time, the organization has assisted 6,500 families find homes. Collishaw admits the process can be arduous. SHE is inundated with applications.

"Good credit is necessary. The USDA is the primary lender and they are strict," said Collishaw. He notes that the USDA provides financial counseling and other services to assist these first-time homeowners.

For those who are selected and who adhere to the shared labor agreement, the rewards are ample.

"No homeowner pays more than 30% of their income on housing costs," Collishaw said.

SHE is currently building 80 homes in five locations, including Reedley. The organization's territory stretches from Bakersfield to Modesto.

The Avenue 413 subdivision provides a real-time example of families working side-by-side with professional builders. The remaining 28 homes are in various states of construction. After the morning celebration finished, families returned to work. Men and women secured bandanas, pulled on work gloves and goggles and picked up shovels, hammers, etc. Collishaw said he expects the remaining homes will be finished before the end of the year.