

## Veterans Housing Program builds new home for 89-year-old veteran

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TEECNOSPOS, Ariz. – An 89-year-old Navajo man who served in the Korean War is getting a new home thanks to the Veterans Housing Program.

On April 14, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez visited the construction site of a new hogan-style home that is being built in Teecnospos, Ariz., for 89-year-old Korean War veteran, Kee C. Nez, who lost his previous home due to a fire. The new two-bedroom home will be completed in several weeks and will also have new appliances, running water, and electricity.

The Navajo Veterans Administration, under Executive Director James Zwierlein, worked

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diligently to pass legislation to update policies under the Veterans Housing Program that allowed the program to proceed with the construction of new homes in Teecnospos, Tuba City, Ariz., and soon in Red Valley, N.M. Many more quality-built homes will be constructed in many other communities for veterans.

In addition to veterans' homes, the Office of the President and Vice President is working with technical experts to propose \$50 million to develop housing manufacturing facilities in different regions of the Navajo Nation. These facilities would be able to produce quality homes for Navajo families if the proposal is approved by the Navajo Nation Council.

"The Veterans Housing Administration is making good progress and homes are being built for Navajo veterans," Jonathan said.

The President continued by thanking Zwierlein for his work on the project.

"To see the joy and smiles on the faces of Mr. Kee Nez and his wife was wonderful," Jonathan said. "They are very appreciative to everyone involved in building their new home. This is a great step forward for the Veterans Housing Program and I commend Mr. Zwierlein for fixing many of the deficiencies and policy issues that were previously in place."

Following the loss of his previous home, Kee and his wife had to move in with their daughter in her nearby home. With the construction set to be completed in May, the elderly couple will get to enjoy the comfort of their new home near family and relatives.

In addition to constructing new homes, the Navajo Veterans Administration is also overseeing repairs and improvements to over 100 homes that were previously constructed for Navajo veterans between 2014 and 2017.

In 2017, the Office of the Auditor General conducted an audit of the Veterans Housing Program. The findings indicated that several veteran homes were not in livable and safe conditions. An inspection of randomly completed homes concluded that the homes did not meet safety and quality standards. The homes were not constructed by the current contractors.

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“This is monumental,” Zwierlein stated in a press release. We have a Navajo-owned enterprise constructing homes in the communities they grew up in. We are taking full advantage of skilled Navajo labor. We are making a positive impact for our veterans and their families.”

Zwierlein gave credit to the Veterans Housing Program team.

“While President Nez credits me with getting program policies and laws fixed, I credit the Veterans Housing Program team with being the boots on the ground,” Zwierlein said. “Led by a Navajo veteran from the Fort Defiance agency, Program Supervisor Mrs. Innan Johns and her staff are the ones pulling this all together. Without their tireless effort, we would not be where we are today.”

He then went into more detail on what the Veterans Housing Program has specifically done.

“They reviewed over 100 individual applications per day for three weeks to ensure potential applicants were qualified for these new homes,” Zwierlein explained. “They have spent countless hours in the field with the contractor working to get homes renovated, and to help the veterans complete their homesite lease applications.”

According to Zwierlein, the Veterans Housing Program started their work in October, and since then they’ve built three new homes and renovated 16.

The Navajo Veterans Administration will continue constructing more homes for Navajo veterans based on the list of housing applications that have been submitted over the course of many years. More homes for Navajo families will be constructed with the approval of additional funding through the American Rescue Plan Act.

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