



For Media Release

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For more information:
Deenise Becenti – 928-729-6221

LIGHT UP NAVAJO SUCCESSFULLY CONNECTS OVER 200 FAMILIES TO ELECTRIC GRID

FORT DEFIANCE, AZ—The Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) is pleased to report the “Light Up Navajo” pilot project was a success and extended electricity to 233 families for the very first time.

During April and May, a total of 138 volunteers from 28 communities and 13 states traveled to the Navajo Nation, where 27 percent of all families live without electricity. Visiting crews worked alongside NTUA linemen energizing a total of 50.28 miles of electric line, connecting 233 homes and raising the standard of life for regional families.

The pilot project represents an unprecedented partnership between a tribal utility and the American Public Power Association (APPA), the service organization for more than 2,000 community-owned electric utilities in the U.S.

According to NTUA General Manager Walter Haase, the partnership also embodied the true American spirit of helping one another.

“This was about more than connecting families,” Haase said. “It was about changing relationships and promoting healing between communities. We live in a time when people are being killed because of race or religion, but that is not the America I know.”

“Through this project, Navajo families witnessed that other parts of America do care and sent their teams to help,” he said. “This is the America that I know.”

The “Light Up Navajo” project evolved from presentations that began when Haase was serving as APPA chairman. During conferences with other public utilities, Haase shared the challenges of extending electricity to Navajo homes.

Representatives from other utilities could not believe that thousands of American families were living without modern conveniences. An estimated 15,000 Navajo families don’t have electricity in their homes, and the average cost to connect one home to the grid is \$40,000. At that rate, it would cost NTUA between \$950 million and \$1 billion to extend electricity to all.

“APPA has a mutual aid program that sends electric crews to areas hit by natural disasters like hurricanes and tornados,” Haase said. “It was suggested that the same model could be used to deploy crews to the Navajo Nation.”

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The program kicked off March 25 with a two-week trial run. A crew from Rochelle, Ill., ran 2.34 miles of line and connected 20 families. In the following seven weeks, crews from an additional 28 communities traveled to the Navajo Nation. The 2019 project wrapped up on May 25.

“Light Up Navajo” customers already are reporting benefits from the program. Being connected to the grid means hundreds of people are experiencing a better quality of life. Some are moving home after years of living off the Navajo Nation.

Others are plugging in basic appliances—making coffee or toast at home for the first time ever. Students can study without kerosene lamps and families can enjoy basic modern conveniences like refrigerated food, heating, air conditioning and televisions.

“Now that we have power, we can go shopping for a week at a time,” said Phyllis Littlefoot, of Tonalea, Ariz., who waited 13 years for electricity.

“We can buy fresh food, fresh produce, so we can eat healthier and we don’t have to drive to town so often,” she said. “We prayed for electricity for so many years because Navajo life can be hard. Now everything is easier, everything is more convenient.”

Haase said he hopes the pilot project serves as a model for future efforts to energize Navajo homes.

“From the pilot project, we learned that there are people and communities willing to come out here and work with us extend electricity to families,” he said. “Our goal with this project was to inspire people. That inspiration led to nationwide participation and for that, we are truly grateful.”

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About NTUA: NTUA has continuously served the Navajo people for 58 years. The NTUA was established on January 22, 1959, to address the absence of utilities on the Navajo Nation. NTUA has grown into a thriving tribally-owned enterprise delivering a portfolio of services. The NTUA is organized for the operation, maintenance and expansion of electric, communications, natural gas, water, wastewater and generation, including photovoltaic (solar) services for the Navajo people at a low and reasonable cost. Other objectives of the NTUA are to promote employment opportunities on the Navajo Nation, and to improve the health and welfare of the residents of the Navajo Nation and raising the standard of life in Navajoland.