

BOOM**Building boom****IN ZUNI Pueblo officials focusing on economic development****BUILDING**

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ZUNI — In the Black Rock community along New Mexico Highway 53 in the Pueblo of Zuni, a dozen men wearing hard hats and heavy duty boots climbed up and down the ladders and scaffolds as they worked at remodeling an entire neighborhood of houses built in the mid-to late 1900s.

About a quarter-mile down the road, several hundred children run through the halls and fields of the new state of the art school, Shiwi Ts'ana Elementary. The school was erected on 21 acres directly across from Dowa Yalanne — the pueblo's

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A new senior center opened earlier this year in Zuni.

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sacred mountain, with a \$26 million grant from the state of New Mexico awarded in 2014-2015. Shiwi Ts'ana Elementary includes a two-story building, a soccer field, an amphitheater for presentations and enough room to accommodate as many as 750 students.

Further west, past Indian Service Route 301, a group of senior citizens gathered for a presentation at the newly built senior citizen center. Military flags waved in the wind at the veterans park built in recent years across the street.

Another quarter of a mile down N.M. 53, more men in heavy-duty boots and hard hats worked at erecting a new supermarket - a 15,000-squarefoot

shop at the supermarkets.

Zuni Pueblo Tribal Administrator Mark Harrington has estimated 80 percent of the income in Zuni goes out to border towns or nearby cities. With the opening of a bigger supermarket, tribal authorities hope to keep some of that money in the pueblo.

"I believe in keeping money in Zuni," Chavez said. "I usually go to Gallup when I have to go to a hardware store. We've been looking at bringing something like an Ace Hardware to Zuni. We have talked about bringing a dollar store, or something similar to a dollar store. When we need to buy giveaways, as during our Harvest Dance, we buy from a dollar store and Wal-Mart. We need that type of store at Zuni." As Chavez expanded on the phone about different projects going on in Zuni, some of which started during

services.

"Without being a gaming tribe, we gotta look at every opportunity and way to generate revenues," Panteah said.

Zuni and gaming

While the pueblo has been traditionally against developing casinos on the reservation, the previous administration sought a gaming compact with New Mexico in 2014 and the Bureau of Indian Affairs approved it in August 2015.

Tribal authorities said there are no plans to open a casino in Zuni. Former Zuni Gov. Arlen Quetawki, who is now a tribal councilman, said in 2015 the pueblo had been leasing its share of slot machines to other tribes in southern Arizona.

facility that will include a deli and large parking lot.

Pinnacle Bank of Gallup is financing the project with a \$2.75 million loan to build the store. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development is providing a guarantee for the loan. The supermarket is scheduled to open later this year.

Are these signs of an economic development boom in Zuni?

"That was our focus when we ran for office, that we wanted economic development," Zuni Councilwoman Virginia Chavez said during a phone interview Friday.

Chavez, who retired from the Zuni Public School District after 30 years serving in different capacities, including finance director, ran for office in 2014, pledging her support for the creation of new businesses in the pueblo. She recalled early on during her first year in office when Loren Thomas visited the Zuni Tribal Council and asked for the council's support to expand his family business to include a shopping center on the corner of N.M. 53 and Mahkee Drive.

"I was overjoyed," Chavez said. "I really wanted that here at Zuni, and we wholeheartedly supported it."

New business

With a population of about 12,000 residents, Zuni is the largest pueblo in New Mexico.

There's only a handful of businesses currently offering services in the pueblo. The Loren family owns Halona Inn and Halona Plaza, a small grocery store at the heart of Zuni, that operates as the Zuni Shopping Center. The family also owns the new supermarket under construction.

A small hardware store is located on the west side of the pueblo. A couple of gas stations offer canned foods, fast food and basic hardware items.

The pueblo has two restaurants, Chu-Chu's and the Zuni Bistro.

the previous administration, Gov. Val Panteah's voice could be heard in the background.

He reminded Chavez about the new airport, which is scheduled to open Oct. 18. He then granted a phone interview.

New airport

The new airport, approximately 5 miles west of the village on N.M. 53, includes a runway about 6,000 feet long by 75 feet wide. In comparison, the old airport, located inside the pueblo's neighborhood of Black Rock, is surrounded by residential areas and includes a 4,400-foot-long by 50-footwide runway. The old runway is considered too short to support emergency landing of large planes.

The total cost of construction was \$5.5 million. About 90 percent of the funds were allocated by the Federal Aviation Administration, 5 percent from the state, and the remaining 5 percent from the Zuni tribe.

Financial analysis

Earlier this year, the tribe contracted the services of Klas Robinson, a financial firm that provides market research, financial feasibility analysis, economic impact analysis, litigation support and other development consulting. Panteah said a Klas Robinson associate visited the pueblo in the spring in preparation for a study on economic development.

"We got a preliminary report," he said. "Once we review that, once we are satisfied with that, we get the full report. It's a comprehensive study that includes a traffic study. Hopefully, it gives us an idea as far as what we can develop here." In the past year, the Zuni Tribal Council has also created an investment committee.

Panteah said Morgan Stanley was recently contacted to manage the pueblo's investments. Morgan Stanley is a global financial services firm providing investment banking, securities, wealth management and investment management

Zuni is in the process of acquiring administrative jurisdiction of some of its parcels at the former Fort Wingate Army Depot. The parcels are located on the north side of the Zuni Mountains, about 40 miles northwest of the pueblo, within a short distance of Interstate Highway 40.



A new supermarket is under construction in Zuni Thursday.

Cable Hoover/Independent



A new elementary school was completed in Zuni last year.

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Most Zuni residents drive 37 miles to Gallup to