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Lumbee Housing Update from NC Indian Housing Authority

Submitted by NC Indian
Housing Authority

Pembroke, NC—In the small office of the North Carolina Indian Housing Authority in Pembroke, the rooms seem to be bursting at the seams with workers. In every corner there are desks. A large table is in the center of one of the rooms and the workers gather around it. Working as a dedicated team, the employees of NC Indian Housing Authority are trying to do the best job they can with the 1998 Lumbee Housing funds.

Not only is the North Carolina Indian Housing Authority providing services for Native Americans, but they are using Native American contractors as well as Native American suppliers. This is one of the many ways that the NCIHA helps Lumbee housing monies to circulate in the Native American communities. This is not only beneficial to the Native American economy in the area but also to Robeson County as a whole.

The Executive Director of the NCIHA David McGirt was at the head of the work table recently as a meeting was called to report the progress of Lumbee Housing. Chris Ozment, Director of Capital Improvements, Billy Brooks, Supervisor of the Rehabilitation Program, and Barbara Lowry, Lead Lumbee Housing Coordinator all gathered to compare notes and report the progress.

Since the beginning of the NCIHA's administration of the Lumbee Housing funds there has been a vast improvement in the homes of over 70 Lumbee Indian families in this area. There are currently fifteen more in the process of having contracts awarded. Brooks who is the main person in charge of the Rehabilitation program goes out with the contractors to as many as fifteen houses. The currently projected goal is to award 20 contracts per month for rehabilitation.

In the Down Payment Assistance Program there have been to this date 76 down payments given for new homes. In the New Home Ownership Program there are several homes that have been closed out and thirteen that are in the process. Also there have been two acquisitions in this program which means that the homes have

been purchased for the families.

The Lumbee Housing is a five year program that is sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The North Carolina Indian Housing Authority is the administrator of the 1998 Funds. Lumbee Regional Development Association is the administrator of the 1999 housing funds.

1998 housing funds administered by the North Carolina Indian Housing Authority is only one of the several programs administered by that agency. Covering the area of Indian Housing is a big job especially in North Carolina. However it appears that NCIHA Executive Director David McGirt has taken the job of overseeing the housing funds as a personal mission.

The Staff of NCIHA

In the Pembroke office the first person one sees when coming in is Helen Cook. Helen really feels good about the Christian environment that is at the NCIHA and she states that she enjoys being able to help others.

Sharon Blue, an office assistant, enjoys her job and states "I enjoy seeing my people get the services they are entitled to and I enjoy helping others."

Chris Ozment, Director of the Capital Improvements division has enjoyed working with the team of NCIHA. "It is a pleasure working with the NCIHA as there is a spirit of team work and the fact that everyone in the organization really cares about the people." Reflecting on his time at the NCIHA, Ozment stated, "When my job is over, I can say we have done some good in the lives of the Lumbee Indians in this area. Working with both Billy Brooks and Theresa Locklear and seeing the dedication to the people, I really feel that we have helped a lot of folks and it has been a truly gratifying experience."

Going out into the field are truly stories that money cannot buy. With the stories are reflections of how the NCIHA is truly in the business of helping people.

Glen Bullard, one of the many Native American contractors who is working with the NCIHA, is currently working on the home of Bessie and Ardell Locklear. This is the fourth home that he has worked on through the housing program. Being in the construction busi-

ness for over 25 years, he is very happy with the opportunity that he now has.

The home of Bessie and Ardell Locklear was gutted by fire in the early part of this year. After seeking assistance and being denied by other agencies, the Locklear sought the assistance of the NCIHA. "When my house was burning up, I was left with nothing other than the clothes on my back, one quilt and the picture of my late son Jerome," said Bessie. After raising fourteen children and three grandchildren in that home, it was sad that all of the memories and the pictures of days gone by were burned up. The Locklear's son, Landis who was in the yard watching the construction workers along with his cousin, Buck is elated to know that his parents have a new place to stay. "Mom and dad never had anything this nice before," Landis said. Landis was raised in the home that was once standing there. "I really think that we have been blessed by the NCIHA. If it was not for them, I know that I would not have a place to stay," said Mr. Ardell who has to use a walker to get around.

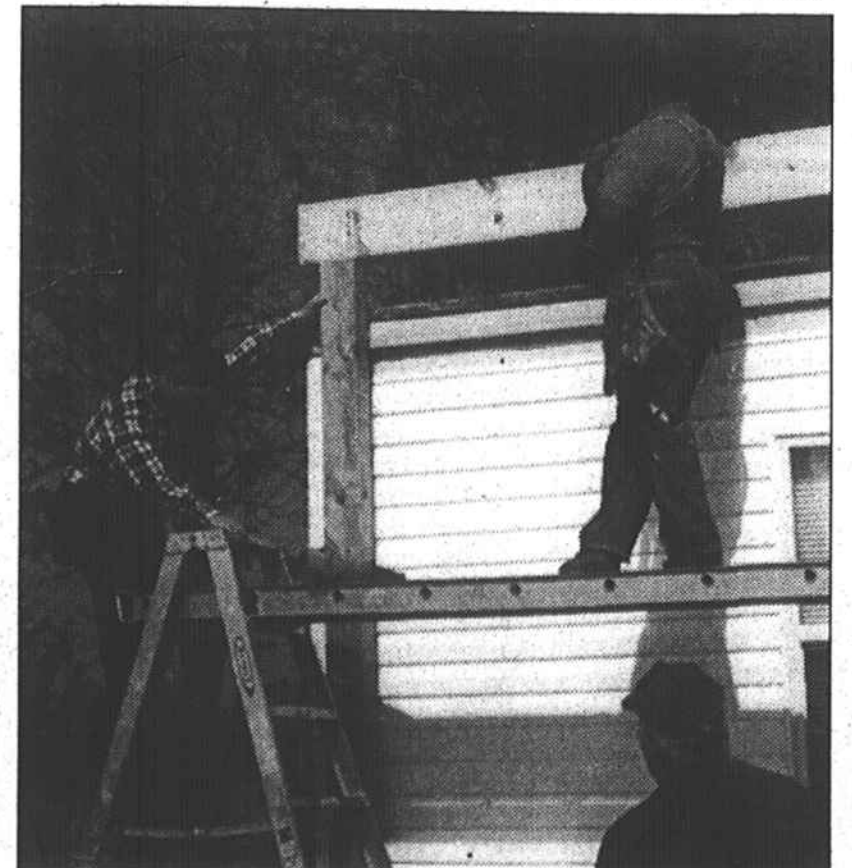
Out in the Fairgrove community, Leon Lowery sits outside and watches Vardell Hunt place new windows in

his home. Hunt who is the owner of Tarheel Construction has been in the construction business since 1969. Driving a painted van that is nicknamed "Miss Daisy," Hunt stated that he is on

his fourth home with the NCIHA Lumbee project. When Brooks came to survey the home, it was in need of air. There was no air or heat other than the base board heating system and there

was a floor that was about to cave in. Lowery who has worked for years and raised six children in the home that he has lived in for 28 years is now on disability. "I know that if it was not for the North Carolina Indian Housing Authority, my home would have never been fixed," Lowery said. "Are you pleased with the work that I am doing for you?" Hunt asked Lowery as they stood in the back yard. "I am just thrilled to death. For all of these years I have heard of Indian money and now you are using it to fix my house," Lowery replied.

These are only two of the over 70 houses that have been renovated by the Rehabilitation Program of the North Carolina Indian Housing Authority.



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