

Jason Wymore, a student at La Sierra University in Riverside, Calif., works on the roof of a hogan in Black Falls, Ariz., on June 16. Students from Berkley and La Sierra universities spent the week in the area helping residents fix their home sites, which have suffered years of neglect because of restrictions from the Bennett Freeze.



Brian Leddy/Independent

# Thawing *the* Freeze

*Project Pueblo helps families in Bennett Freeze area*

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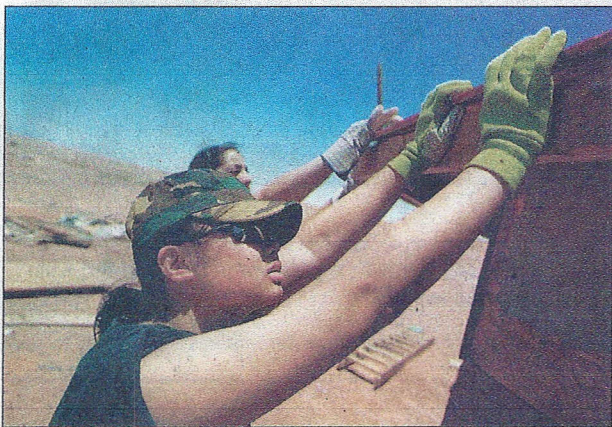
**B**LACK FALLS, Ariz. — Sand blew into the faces of four college students working to rebuild the roof of a dilapidated hogan in the blazing sun. Slabs of plywood resembling pieces of a puzzle were shimmied together on the eight-sided dwelling to replace others worn by more than five decades under the Arizona sun.

The group of workers was not contracted by any construction company nor the Navajo Housing Authority, they were volunteers with Project Pueblo, a non-profit group of students and volunteers from University of California-Berkeley and La Sierra University in California.

Though the four students had little, if any, experience with construction, the consensus was that they were doing a good deed.

“You see the conditions these people are living in and it’s impossible to not want to help out,” said Jason Wymore, a La Sierra student.

Project Pueblo began at the hands of Sean and Ryan Wycliffe, two brothers in their 20s looking to make a difference in the world. Sean had



Brian Leddy/Independent

Gar-Wei Lee holds a board while working on a hogan in Black Falls, Ariz., June 16. Students from the University of California-Berkeley and La Sierra University spent the week in the area helping residents fix their home sites, which have suffered years of neglect because of restrictions from the Bennett Freeze.

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Amber Nelson hammers nails into particle board while working on a hogan in Black Falls, Ariz., June 16. Students from The University of California-Berkley and La Sierra University spent the week in the area helping residents fix their home sites, which have suffered years of neglect because of restrictions from the Bennett Freeze.



## Bennett Freeze

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read the book, "The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time" by Jefferey D. Sachs and immediately wanted to get to work on helping out a community.

"Initially I thought Mexico, but I came out to the reservation and was surprised by the conditions out here," he said during an earlier trip to the area.

The UC-Berkeley economics student contacted his brother, a pre-med major at La Sierra and started to plan service trips. The organization brought a couple dozen students to the former Bennett Freeze region in March during their spring break to begin assessments on homes for solar panels and water systems. Most of the homes are in states of disrepair — some lacking electricity and running water, others without a concrete foundation.

Families living in the area were barred from making improvements and repairs to their homes for more than 40 years, when Robert Bennett,

former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, placed a "freeze" on the land in 1966 during the Navajo-Hopi land dispute. Though the freeze was meant to be a temporary solution to prevent both tribes from taking advantage of each other, residents in the 1.5 million-acre area have been living in the same conditions for decades.

"We didn't know any of this was going on," said Aubrey Ferguson, a biochemistry junior at La Sierra during the spring break trip. "They didn't teach us any of this in history."

Project Pueblo teamed up to help the Forgotten People, a grassroots organization of those affected by the freeze, which was repealed by President Obama in 2009, and began planning service trips to assess the needs of the people and the homes in the area. The latest trip in mid-June included 14 students to continue with the solar and water assessments and to begin construction projects: The hogan renovation and the assembly of a new bathroom at the

homes of two older couples.

"The situation in which people are living without power and running water is hard to swallow," Wymore said. "But then to realize it's happening in our own backyard is almost appalling."

The hogan was John Knight's home before its dereliction forced him and his wife Mary out to live in a fifth-wheel trailer. The Knights have since built a small cinder block house on the property, which Mary claims because John continued to call the hogan his home and longed to move back. Under the direction of Mike Charley — whose partner, Pam, is the Knights' daughter — the group of students used hand-held hammers instead of a nail gun and a small hand-held saw was fueled by a gas-powered generator.

"I don't feel like we're lacking anything," said Amber Nelson, a Berkeley graduate student grabbing a fistful of nails out of a Maxwell House coffee can. "The people out here are living it, doing most of the work, all we're supply-

ing is the muscles."

Mary checked in with the work crew periodically, bringing them a meatloaf and corn on the cob lunch, seemingly pleased with the progress on her husband's beloved home. Families associated with the Forgotten People often host the students, allowing them to sleep on their floors and share their meals.

"The amount of hope they have is heart-warming despite the adversity they've been through," Ryan Wycliffe said back in March.

Project Pueblo is planning to continue their service missions in the area and hoping to raise more awareness along the way. "We believe doing good shouldn't be a chore," Wycliffe said, adding that he was shocked more people aren't aware of the issues in the area.

"It's incredible that the Grand Canyon is so close. How many millions of people come to see it but they don't stop and help?"