

New Center Gives Pascua Yaqui Tribe ‘Our Heart’

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For 3,600 members of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe living in and around Guadalupe, Ariz., most tribal life has been two hours away, at the reservation near Tucson. But construction of Itom Hiapsi, which translates as “our heart” in the native language, created a full suite of services under one roof in the suburban Phoenix town.

“I’m a tribal member,” said Carlos Valencia, who also works as a student adviser for the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade program at Itom Hiapsi, a 37,000-square-foot center that opened in 2014. “I grew up in the community, working with other agencies. I always had an interest in being in the [Pascua Yaqui] community. A lot of us grew up here and were interested, but never really knew what it meant to be an enrolled member. Now we have access to things we never had.” Valencia is proud of the work not only with tribal members, but with the rest of the community. “They’re excited to come to a centralized location,” Valencia said.

There was a need for a center for the Pascua Yaqui tribal-enrolled community in Guadalupe, since 3,600 of the

nation’s approximately 19,000 members live in Guadalupe and the greater Phoenix area. Before Itom Hiapsi opened in 2014 thanks to a financial boost from new markets tax credits (NMTCs), the services were spread among four buildings in Guadalupe. The services offered to the tribal-enrolled members then and now come from the departments such as administration, center spirit behavior health, adult services, victim services, community and adult education, senior services, facilities management, legal services, enrollment, health nursing and Yaqui Education Services (YES).

For example, the education program staff dealt with a stubbornly high truancy rate and needed to work with colleagues in behavioral health to bring entire families together to address the problem. Without adequate facilities, it was impossible. Now they all work together and truancy in Guadalupe has dropped by more than 60 percent.

The construction was a significant development in Guadalupe when it began in 2012. It was the largest office

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Image: Courtesy of Travois New Markets

Itom Hiapsi, which means “our heart” in the Yaqui language, is a 37,000-square-foot community center that opened in 2014 in Guadalupe, Ariz.



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building in Guadalupe, in a prominent location of the tribe's property at the southern "gateway" into Guadalupe. "It was really exciting to have all of our services under one roof," said Gino Turrubiarres, the Guadalupe Administrator for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. "It's the newest building in Guadalupe and the very first tribal administration service building ever built in Guadalupe. It was electric."

Ian Geitner was the project manager for Hill International when it built Itom Hiapsi, and now he is the project manager for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, working in Tucson on the reservation on many projects. He said the biggest task during construction was keeping everyone together. "It was as much about personal relationships as business relationships," Geitner said.

The goal was to allow the Pascua Yaqui Tribe to construct a center that meets the needs of tribal members and serves as a satellite community center. It assures that tribal members in Guadalupe receive the same levels of service as their fellow tribal members living on the reservation. The building was designed with the idea to include cultural aspects of the tribe. "Everybody looked around Guadalupe and realized what we were going to do," said Geitner. "We saw the end goal the whole time."

Themed Services

J. Michael Bland, CDE manager for Travois New Markets, the community development entity (CDE) that was the allocatee of the NMTCs that helped fund the development, called Itom Hiapsi "sort of the tribal headquarters for that area." That it's so well-rounded was by design. "They wanted to build a one-stop shop that has privacy for behavior health and CPS," Bland said. "It's a place where you can come and get everything taken care of in an hour or two."

The center's services are organized around the theme of a "circle of care." It's a health clinic where families access services during one visit, including a comprehensive treatment program for children and teens, then go to the meditation or healer room for traditional Yaqui holistic medicine. The center also offers legal services and a satellite office for enrollment that is linked via broadband to the



Image: Courtesy of Travois New Markets

A statue of renowned deer dancer Luis Sinsuevo is included at the Itom Hiapsi in Guadalupe, Ariz.

central government records in Tucson, Ariz. Space was designed to emphasize privacy and security.

The YES program is housed there. Every student who maintains a 2.0 GPA receives a cash subsidy to assist with tuition or expenses. There is Yaqui tradition and art throughout the design, including a statue of renowned deer dancer Luis Sinsuevo and a traditional creosote bush outside the building from which elders can trim branches to grow their own garden or for herbal remedies. Inside, the lobby holds a time capsule decorated with the humming bird, an important Yaqui symbol and Yaqui artists painted all the works that decorate the hallways, conference rooms and offices.

Estelle Bartholow, vice president, new markets tax credit group at investor Wells Fargo, also said she liked the fact that the building fits in culturally, as well as in terms of usefulness. Bland also likes the cultural portions of Itom Hiapsi, including important bushes outside. "I like the structure of it, the concept of a one-stop shop. It's cool

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how they designed spaces to represent the Yaqui culture. They offer everything under the sun,” said Bland.

The center serves people beyond Guadalupe, covering much of Maricopa County. “The building services a lot of areas. There’s a youth education program, a meals program [with breakfast and lunch on weekdays and weekends] and it’s not just outreach to tribal members,” Turrubiarres said.

Unusual Offering

That a Yaqui building is so far from the nearest reservation is unusual. “It’s fairly common for there to be tribal members in regional hubs, but I don’t know how many communities have a big tribal area that isn’t on the reservation,” said Bland. “For Yaquis, it’s fairly normal, but most tribes offer similar services only on their reservations.”

With the Guadalupe community so large, the need was apparent. “It’s unique in that 50 percent of the community is tribal, but they’re not on a reservation,” Bland said. “It’s a beautiful building and great programs.”

“It’s nice that it’s located in an area that has a lot of tribal members who didn’t have great access to go back (to Tucson),” Bartholow said. “They were essential services to give better access to these types of things.”

For those involved, the holistic approach is valued. “It’s not only the services, but the activities and events,” Turrubiarres said. “There’s a youth program, education program, elder program and more. They have a center, where they cannot only come and have their needs met, but more.”

Finances

The development closed with the investor in 2012 and was completed in 2014. There was investor equity from Wells Fargo of \$2.7 million of the \$9 million cost. CDE Travois

is a finance company focused on building a better future for Native Americans. It was founded by David Bland in 1995 to help tribes utilize or use the federal low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) program.

“We have been working with the Pascua-Yaqui Tribe on the low-income housing side, so we had a relationship,” J. Michael Bland said. “But we hadn’t worked in the Guadalupe area. The staff member who ran the LIHTC program also worked on the economic development side. They’re a successful tribe that’s well run. We also consulted for them on another NMTC deal with Wells Fargo.”

“We really liked the project,” said Bartholow. “It provides a variety of significant services to tribal members in Guadalupe, who are an hour and a half from Tucson. That Travois was the consultant and CDE was important, too.”

Success

“This is a great example of how the new markets tax credit works,” said John Sciarretti, a partner in Novogradac’s Dover, Ohio, office who consulted on the financial closing process. “Itom Hiapsi is making a difference in people’s lives, both in the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and in the rest of the Guadalupe community. It’s exciting to see such a big impact.”

Bland said the staff has grown from about 50 when Itom Hiapsi opened to about 65 now—and there is still available space. He also said it is a good opportunity for tribal members from Tucson to have a location to visit while in the Phoenix area.

And while the main target audience is tribal members, Turrubiarres points out that many programs are offered to anyone in the community. “As a nontribal member, I see this as a great bridge between the tribe and community,” Turrubiarres said. “There are common goals and common ground.” ♦

Itom Hiapsi FINANCING

- \$6.3 million from the Pascua Yaqui Tribe
- \$2.7 million NMTC equity investment from Wells Fargo through Travois New Markets