

Kewa Pueblo: Families forced to leave mold-tainted homes

Uprooted in hail's wake, tribe waits help

By Sandra Baltazar Martinez | The New Mexican

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Photo by: [Natalie Guillén](#)/The New Mexican

KEWA PUEBLO — For the first time in more than two years, Dominique Martinez, 2, has been able to sleep through the night.

Dominique, who suffers from cerebral palsy, had been struggling to breathe at night because of mold in her family's home. After a hailstorm earlier this month damaged the family's 1916 adobe home at Kewa Pueblo, Dominique was displaced along with four family members, including her sickly grandmother, Andrea Calabaza. For the past week, they have been staying at the Love Your Heart Program administrative building, where offices are filled with cots, blankets and a few personal items for several displaced Pueblo families.

Meanwhile, outside of Calabaza's adobe house, a handful of dried corn stems barely stand. The lonely house, with white-painted walls now smeared with mud, is permeated with a strong moldy stench. Other rainstorms have slowly crippled the home, but the Oct. 2 hailstorm made it uninhabitable.

"I never knew (mold) was affecting her so much," said Holly Martinez, 24, Dominique's mother. "At our house, she would wake up at night, gasping for air. Here, she sleeps through the night."

The storm left about 600 Kewa families with severe water damage to their homes; 66 families face imminent health risks and need to move, said Kenny Pin, public-information officer for the pueblo. Officials still need to conduct an official assessment of the losses, but a preliminary estimate of the damages indicate the pueblo may need up to \$2 million for reconstruction, Pin said.

"We've relocated 20 (families); the others don't want to move," Pin said.

The major concerns are senior citizens and children, which is why the Martinez-Calabaza family was placed in a temporary home, said Mike Calabaza, the pueblo's incident commander.

Andrea Calabaza, 55, has asthma, severe rheumatoid arthritis and trouble moving around after knee and hip replacements.

"I was just told that I have a fungus infection in my nose because of the mildew," she said as she took a break from a red-beaded necklace she was crafting. Her belongings now sit in plastic containers and trash bags all over the crowded adobe house.

"I'm just hoping they'll let me know if they'll have my house fixed. It's been very stressful," Andrea Calabaza said.

Her main source of income is from sales of beaded jewelry, "Kool-Aid pickles, Gummi Bears and sunflower seed. The kids really like them," Andrea Calabaza said.

Her home was her business. But with the water damage — especially to a back room where water seeped through the ground and flooded the entire space — that will be a challenge, she said. The room is putrefying. Water lines indicate the flooding reached about 18 inches from the ground.

The pueblo's preschool playground also flooded, the exterior of some mobile homes are now porous because of the hail and Santo Domingo Church has a leak.

Earl Breon of the National Weather Service said hail reports from Oct. 2 indicate the area received 1- to 2-inch hailstones that plunged to the ground at 70 mph.

Eleven days after the storm, Kewa Pueblo administrators are asking for help at many levels. They primarily need food, building materials and construction volunteers who can help assess the damages.

"We're a nongaming tribe," Pin said. "People always assume when they hear 'tribe,' 'Oh they have money,' but we don't."

Pueblo administrators and residents are feeling the stress, said Mike Calabaza, because homeowners are asking for help and there is no money.

Gov. Bill Richardson has allocated \$250,000 for Kewa Pueblo in order to "help reimburse the pueblo for cleanup, repair and rebuilding of public infrastructure."

However, the money is not specified for residential housing reconstruction, Mike Calabaza said. So far, volunteers have arrived to clean up homes.

Today, about 20 pallets — or close to 23,000 pounds — of emergency food, health, cleaning and hygiene products will arrive from National Relief Charities in Phoenix. The organization has been working with Kewa Pueblo since 2007. It also works with 12 other pueblos as well as four reservations in New Mexico, said Helen Oliff, National Relief Charities' public-relations manager.

While the awaited help starts to flow in, Mike Calabaza dreams of helping more than just one family.

"I know this is a long shot ... but my plan is to help the entire community and not single anybody out," Mike Calabaza said.

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