

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Contact: Dain Hansen**
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Thoreau, N.M. (Oct. 22, 2018) — The International Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (IWSH) Foundation's 2018 Community Plumbing Challenge (CPC) began today in Thoreau, New Mexico. The CPC's focus is the Navajo Water Project, an initiative of the nonprofit organization DigDeep that was among the 2018 recipients of the U.S. Water Prize. The initiative's goal is to help ensure that every American has clean, running water forever. The CPC, which runs through Friday, is hosted by the St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School in Thoreau, a small town in Northwestern New Mexico.

The Navajo Nation CPC assembles a multi-disciplined team of skilled tradespeople to execute plumbing and construction projects that will improve living conditions in approximately 10 households nominated by U.S.-based nonprofit organization DigDeep. Inside homes, a range of bathroom and kitchen renovations will be carried out, including the installation of new basins, taps, toilets, water tanks, water pumps, and hot- and cold-water pipework. These renovations and repairs are required in order for these homes to be connected to water supply systems. Meanwhile, efforts outdoors will address the installation of, and connection to, new wastewater systems.

After the morning's welcome ceremony, participants in the exclusive Ambassador Program took part in the "Water and Sanitation Crisis in America Roundtable: Government & Industry Working Together for Solutions" at the Thoreau Chapter House. In addition to focusing on issues concerning tribal lands, the roundtable looked at issues facing the more than 1.6 million people across the U.S. without access to clean water and safe sanitation.

U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., and representatives from the offices of U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, D-Santa Fe, and U.S. Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham, D-Albuquerque, attended the welcome ceremony and roundtable. Also in attendance were officials from LIXIL, Reliance Worldwide, Milwaukee, GE Appliances, Winsupply of Albuquerque, Indian Health Services, Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico Regulation and Licensing Department, DigDeep, the Mechanical Contractors Association of New Mexico, as well as Tom Bigley, director of plumbing services for the United Association, and representatives from numerous plumbing local unions.

Heinrich said the geography of the Navajo Nation is so challenging that multiple things must be done at the same time to be able to create the basic infrastructure in places like Thoreau. The federal Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project will result in hundreds of miles of new supply line, but remote areas such as Thoreau may remain out of reach for the time being.

"That still doesn't connect people in these really remote areas," he said. "You have to have multiple different approaches, and having skilled labor come and make sometimes really basic fixes that make things work in somebody's own home? That's just invaluable, absolutely invaluable, and so I think we need to learn how to walk and chew gum at the same time, really build on these partnerships, look at how we do the same sort of approach for electrification in many of these remote locations, and all work together as a team."

Work on the projects is scheduled to be completed by Friday. A 90-minute community forum and presentation will be held at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Baca-Prewitt Chapter House. The farewell ceremony is set for 6 p.m. Friday at the El Rancho Hotel in Gallup, New Mexico. To learn more about the event, visit the project website at www.commplumbing.org or email info@iwsh.org. Visit www.iwsh.org.