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Contact: Mike Flenniken
(909) 937-9642
info@iwsh.org

IWSH Improving Access to Hygiene Facilities for American Indian Students at Bacone College

Muskogee, Oklahoma (April 13, 2023) — The International Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation (IWSH) team, with support from volunteers, constructed a laundry facility for the students living on campus at [Bacone College](#), **Oklahoma's oldest operating institution of higher learning, which** has served American Indian students for 140 years.

Supporting under-resourced schools is a core part of [IWSH's focus](#). Bacone College, along with other tribal colleges and universities, helps eliminate barriers to a college education for many Native students by providing an opportunity to earn a degree and have adequate housing at a low cost. However, students living on campus did not previously have access to suitable laundry facilities.

"We knew our students would benefit from a laundry facility so they wouldn't have to drive off campus and spend their valuable time and money on services that we wanted the college to provide," said Dr. Leroy Thompson, chief operating officer for Bacone College. **"Because we're a historic college, many of** our plumbing and HVAC systems are dated. Here at Bacone, our goal is to provide quality education and help American Indians improve their future and gain access to opportunities. This laundry facility is one facet of improving student life by providing access to affordable and reliable hygiene services. Thank you to IWSH for what they did for our students – a seemingly small project will make a huge difference in the students' lives."

To help provide these students with convenient and efficient laundry facilities, the IWSH team spent the first week of April fully remodeling an existing classroom, transforming it into a laundry facility that includes two sets of washers and dryers, and a wash sink. The work included installing drains, water lines, gas piping, and venting, and was implemented by volunteer, licensed plumbers.

"As a plumber, it is an honor and a pleasure to be able to use my skills to give back to my surrounding community," said Lee La Voie, a plumber with Coe Plumbing in Oklahoma City. **"I am a new volunteer** with IWSH, and it was a unique opportunity to be in service to people who needed access to services we typically take for granted. I was thrilled to be able to help construct the new laundry facility for the students at Bacone College and I look forward to helping more in the future."

With support from its partners, IWSH was able to utilize proper materials in the project, such as lead-free piping and energy-efficient appliances. IWSH received an additional donation from the Illinois State Organization of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution to purchase the appliances used in the new laundry facility.

"The Illinois State Organization of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution is proud to support academic institutions, particularly American Indian schools that have historically been under-resourced," said Joyce Schmale, the state chairman of the American Indian Committee. **"In** working with Bacone College, we recognized they did not have access to certain facilities that many universities provide. So, we reached out to IWSH to help construct a new laundry facility for the students who live on campus. IWSH understands how access to adequate hygiene services can help improve lives, and they have provided a new facility that gives the students affordable and convenient laundry amenities for the first time ever."



**The International Water, Sanitation
and Hygiene Foundation**

Phone: +1 844 497 4674 | info@iwsh.org
101 Constitution Avenue, NW Suite 825 East
Washington, D.C. 20001

“This project was particularly meaningful because our volunteer plumbers were all members of the same family and spent the days learning from one another and deepening their skills,” said Randy Lorge, project director for IWSH North America. “Our work brings together industry professionals to provide these valuable services and creates real camaraderie. IWSH is immensely grateful for our sponsors and volunteers — their generous contributions helped make this project possible.”

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The International Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation (IWSH) is the philanthropic arm of the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO®). For more information, visit www.iwsh.org.