

Albuquerque Indian School only a memory

by Mary Bowannie

Albuquerque, New Mexico (NFIC)

The land many Native American students called home since the late 1800s is now the site for a new business complex.

The 46 acres that were once the site of the Albuquerque Indian School (AIS), a boarding school for many Native Americans in the southwest since 1881, is now only a memory. The land where the school once stood is set for development and will now be known as The Pueblo Center Business Complex.

The complex will be built by The Indian Pueblo Federal Development Corporation (IPFDC) which is owned and operated by New Mexico's 19 Pueblos.

IPFDC plans to construct a 200,000 square foot facility for the Bureau of Indian Affairs Southwest Regional Offices, and a 150,000 square foot facility for the Indian Health Service. Other plans for the land include a hotel, conference and events center and a "green area" for cultural activities.

At The Site Dedication Ceremony on July 19, pueblo, state and government leaders spoke of the hard work to make the complex a reality. All Indian Pueblo Council Chairman (AIPC) and IPFDC Treasurer, Amadeo Shije, of Zia Pueblo, said the development of the site was a long, tedious process.

"It's really gratifying to see some kind of development on this property, it's long overdue. We've proven to the public and the agencies

in Washington and locally, put something in front of us and we will go around it or through it."

The Presbyterian Church transferred control of the school to the federal government in 1884. The school remained under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) until it was transferred in the 1980s to the All Indian Pueblo Council. The school eventually closed in 1982 with the land held in trust for the 19 Pueblos in 1983. Throughout the early 1980s the buildings fell victim to vandalism and fires and were eventually torn down in 1985.

While the speakers at the dedication spoke about the future and the opportunity for the complex to generate development and revenue for the 19 Pueblos, many stressed not to forget the history and importance of the land. Alvino Sandoval came to the Albuquerque Indian School in 1947 when he was just 10 years old. Sandoval, a Navajo from Tohajiilee, N.M., said his mother woke him up one day and told him he was going somewhere where he would have food to eat and a warm place to sleep. He said she never mentioned anything about getting an education.

"I never went off the reservation and all of a sudden they shipped me out and I ended up here. There used to be a vineyard, orchards and we even had some dairy cows. Later the cows were moved to SIPI (the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute). We had our own bakery and Indian hospital."

Sandoval graduated in 1958 and while he has not kept in contact with his former classmates, he thinks of his years at the AIS often.

"I feel sad when I go by here and see this empty spot. Those buildings we went to school in, slept in, those were really strong buildings. Those buildings were really made well. I don't know anything about it (the complex development). Maybe when they build it, establish it, maybe then we will know if it's gonna work."

works out a Memorandum of Agreement with the City of Albuquerque over building codes and services, said Darrell Felipe of Acoma Pueblo and IPFDC Chief Executive Officer. The site, considered Indian trust land, is held in trust by the Department of Interior and is not subject to local building and tax laws.