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Fyi:

Cadets build hogans in summer engineering class

LANCE BENZEL

An Air Force Academy course for aspiring engineers will result in two new houses for needy families.

As part of the annual summer semester Field Engineering and Readiness Laboratory, cadets are building two hogans — traditional, eight-sided Navajo dwellings that will be donated to the Navajo Nation in New Mexico.

“It’s probably the most rewarding thing that any of us has done,” said Damian Franz, a senior who completed the course last year and returned this summer to help oversee the juniors enrolled this summer.

The field engineering laboratory is required for civil engineering majors.

Building the hogans and other class projects involves surveying, welding, heavy equipment use, pouring concrete beams and road paving, among other nuts-and-bolts elements of the cadets’ future profession.

“It really combines a lot of aspects of civil engineering,” Franz said.

Academy cadets have completed 29 homes for the Navajo Reservation in northwestern New Mexico since 1994.

The nonprofit Southwest Indian Foundation pays to have the hogans transported to the reservation and placed onto foundations. A team of cadets typically visits the reservation during their spring break to dedicate the new homes and perform community service.

Nearly 100 cadets are involved in the project. They work under the supervision of a cadre of active-duty civil engineers from the National Guard and Air Force Reserve and other branches.

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