

# VALLEY VOICE

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## Self-Help Enterprises celebrates 60 years of impact

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By: Valley Voice Contributor

On December 6, 2024, Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) marked a monumental milestone—60 years of empowering communities across the San Joaquin Valley. More than 400 supporters, community leaders, and partners gathered at the Visalia Convention Center to celebrate this achievement, reflecting on our past and looking ahead to the future. The venue buzzed with energy, as guests shared stories and laughter, all under the soft glow of chandeliers. It was a night to remember, filled with gratitude, inspiration, and an unwavering commitment to creating a brighter tomorrow for the families and communities we serve.

As the evening unfolded, SHE's President and CEO, Tom Collishaw, took the stage to reflect on the organization's incredible journey and its lasting impact. His remarks were a powerful reminder of the perseverance and dedication that has driven SHE's success over the past six decades.

Tom emphasized the essence of SHE's mission, recalling how the organization began in 1965 with a small group of pioneers committed to improving the living conditions of farmworker families. "The story of Self-Help Enterprises is in fact a recurring cycle with four parts: inspiration, innovation, doing the work, and impact," Tom explained. He went on to highlight how SHE's evolution—from its early days to its current leadership in affordable housing, infrastructure, and climate resilience—continues to drive meaningful change in the communities we serve. His message was clear: the journey from inspiration to innovation, followed by hard work, is what drives meaningful impact.

In 60 years, SHE has made a profound impact on the communities it serves. Key achievements include the creation of 6,500 self-help homes, 3,000 affordable rental units across 60 sites, and the rehabilitation of 7,000 homes. Additionally, 35,000 water and sewer connections have been established, 12,000 households have received emergency water services, and 18,000 families have benefited from housing counseling. SHE has also helped 2,300 homebuyers secure affordable financing outside of the self-help program. In total, nearly 85,000 families have been positively impacted by these efforts—a testament to the dedication of SHE's staff, partners, and supporters.

In his closing remarks, Tom shared a message that resonated deeply with all those in attendance: "I am inspired tonight!" He continued by naming several sources for his inspiration, including the incredible work of SHE's staff, the support of generous donors, and the stories of families who have transformed their lives through SHE's programs. "I am inspired tonight by families like the Matakas, who bet on themselves by building their own homes and neighborhoods," Tom shared, underscoring the personal stories that have driven SHE's mission. He went on to speak about the urgency of addressing the challenges ahead—housing affordability, water scarcity, climate change, and racial equity. Yet, he remains hopeful. "Going forward, we will use this inspiration as fuel to innovate, do the hard work, and impact our communities in the years to come," he affirmed.

In addition to Tom's remarks, the evening featured guest speakers who have been crucial partners in SHE's work. Lisa Hasegawa, Regional Vice President of NeighborWorks America, praised SHE's

comprehensive community development approach and emphasized the importance of collaboration in building stronger, more resilient communities.

Olivia Gomez, a community leader in Planada and a SHE board member, shared her personal journey and the profound impact SHE's work has had on her community, particularly in addressing rural water infrastructure issues.

Kayode Kadara, a current member and past Chair of the SHE Board and a key community leader in Allensworth, echoed Olivia's sentiment, emphasizing the importance of local leadership in driving lasting change.

Joaquin Esquivel, Chair of the California State Water Resources Control Board, discussed the critical need for water equity and climate resilience in rural California.

Arsenio Mataka, Deputy Executive Officer at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, shared his personal connection to SHE, recalling how his parents were part of SHE's early self-help housing program. "It's amazing to see how this organization has impacted so many families, including my own," he said, reflecting on how SHE's work is a model for building sustainable, thriving communities.

As the night drew to a close, the excitement continued with dancing, mingling, and conversation filled with optimism for the future. The same spirit of inspiration that has guided SHE from the beginning continued to drive the evening's energy and collective hope for the road ahead. With the support of our partners, donors, and community leaders, we are more committed than ever to building stronger, more resilient communities for the future.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we'll continue to create lasting change and ensure vibrant, more sustainable communities for generations to come.

Here's to the next 60 years of making a difference!