

Work on a Tigua kiva nears completion

Darren Meritz / El Paso Times

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EL PASO-- The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, or Tiguas, are nearing completion on a year-long project to build a ceremonial kiva, a circular room built by Pueblo Indians throughout the Southwest for religious and spiritual rituals.

The Tiguas began construction of the already blessed, 30-foot diameter kiva at the Ysleta reservation last March. They expect completion of the project in by March. The kiva will be used for special rituals and ceremonies unique to the Tiguas.

"We want to be able to teach these ceremonies to our youths so they continue with them because, if we don't, little by little they will fade away," said Tigua Lt. Gov. Carlos Hisa. "So what we want to do is pass this down."

Using volunteer help from tribal members, the Tiguas are building the kiva near the site of the tribe's tuhsla, another ceremonial grounds used by the tribe for special meetings and celebrations.

Elected representatives from the Tigua tribal government would not allow photographs to be taken of the kiva last week because the site already had been blessed and officials did not want to be disrespectful toward its spiritual significance.

Newly elected War Capt. Javier Loera said the Tiguas haven't had a similar kiva since the 19th century. Over time, the Tiguas have relocated and most recently have moved northward as encroachment has impacted the tribe, tribe members said.

"We are Pueblo Indians, and all Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona have kivas," he said. "It's a symbol

of our emergence from other cultures that have been here before."

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Loera said kivas typically are constructed of stone with an entrance through the roof. Benches line the kiva walls and a fire pit, or hearth, is constructed in the middle of the kiva.

The kiva is a structure that has been used since before Tiguas adopted Hispanic traditions and Catholic beliefs. Loera described it as "aboriginal to our people."

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The new kiva being constructed by the Tigua tribe is shown in an undated photo provided by the Tiguas. The 30-foot diameter kiva will be used by the tribe for special religious and spiritual ceremonies. (Courtesy of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo)