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**Base Donates Used Base Housing to Tribes**

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By Elisa L. Rineheart

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Grand Forks Herald, N.D.

RISMEDIA, Feb. 17 – (KRT) – Grand Forks Air Force Base officials said Tuesday that they plan to donate about \$4 million in used housing units to two North Dakota American Indian tribes this summer.

The base plans to donate 20 officer units -- four single-family homes and eight duplexes -- averaging 1,300 square feet to North Dakota's Turtle Mountain and Fort Berthold tribes by mid-July, said Chris Powell, base housing manager.

Six additional units will be donated soon, he said.

"With the introduction of new Air Force housing size standards, it became more economical to build new homes instead of performing costly upgrades to existing units," Powell said.

Base officials said they expect to donate even more homes by 2009, when the base's new housing will be completed.

Walking Shield

The multimillion donation is part of Operation Walking Shield, a decade-old cooperative partnership between 35 tribal nations across the country and seven government organizations, including the Defense Department. Walking Shield members include the Army, Navy, Cost Guard and Air Force.

Operation Walking Shield focuses on improving the quality of life of Indian tribes, Powell said.

The organization provides affordable housing, humanitarian aid and medical and dental care to Indians throughout the nation, he said.

The base's Walking Shield three- and four-bedroom houses are in good condition and are fully equipped. Their features include kitchen appliances, hot water heaters and furnaces, Powell said.

Environmental assessments will be performed for each house, he said.

The replacement value of each home is about \$200,000, base officials said.

"Donating the homes instead of demolishing them saves taxpayer dollars and avoids landfill overcrowding," Powell said.

Donation stock

Housing units donated to Indian reservations typically come from closed or downsized bases. Grand Forks Air Force Base still is donating homes left over from the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure Round. It relocated the 150 intercontinental ballistic missiles and missile wing at the base, leaving Grand Forks as one of the nation's primary refueling

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tanker bases.

Many recently donated homes come from bases slated to replace their housing inventory, such as Grand Forks Air Force Base.

Under Operation Walking Shield guidelines, the military provides four different types of housing infrastructures to Indian reservations: new homes, relocatable units, mutual self-help housing and manufactured housing.

In past years, Grand Forks Air Force Base has donated more than 460 relocatable housing units to 11 tribes in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. Most of them were single-story duplexes with three and four bedrooms.

Since its inception in 1994, Operation Walking Shield has provided more than 900 relocatable units to 14 different Indian reservations.

Moving contractors from Operation Walking Shield will transport the single-family homes with specially designed equipment. Duplexes will be cut in half and reconstructed at the reservations.

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