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For Immediate Release

September 29, 2020

**GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY AND DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ENTER INTO
LEASE FOR CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

(Sacaton, Arizona) – On Tuesday, the Gila River Indian Community and the Department of the Interior entered into a lease for the Casa Blanca Community School located on the Gila River Indian Reservation. This lease was executed as part of the Department of the Interior’s section 105(l) leasing program contained in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA). The program furthers tribal self-determination through lease negotiations to compensate tribal nations for programs that are part of ISDEAA’s contracting or compacting authority.

This is the second such lease entered into by the Gila River Indian Community. The initial lease was the first of its kind at the Department of the Interior and formalized an innovative school construction lease for the Gila Crossing Community School also located on the Reservation. That school opened in August of 2019.

Both the Gila Crossing Community School and the Casa Blanca Community School are tribally-run Bureau of Indian Education Schools that were first built over 100 years ago and had become overcrowded and were in poor condition. However, due to the existing backlog to construct BIE schools, neither school would have been constructed for several more decades.

So, the Gila River Indian Community utilized an innovative approach to construct the Gila Crossing Community School by constructing the new school and leasing it back to the Department of the Interior. Today’s lease signing for the existing Casa Blanca Community School is the first step in a school construction/leaseback for that school which has student attendance of approximately 240 students.

Governor Lewis stated, “The Gila River Indian Community is proud to work in partnership with the Department of the Interior to expand this lease program that offers an alternative approach to constructing much-needed infrastructure in Indian Country. This program furthers tribal self-determination without compromising the trust responsibility and utilizes a 45-year-old law to meet the infrastructure and programmatic needs to today’s tribal nations.”

The Casa Blanca Community School lease is the second school lease entered into between the Department of the Interior and the Gila River Indian Community and the fourth overall lease entered into by the Department of the Interior since the Gila Crossing Community School lease was signed in July of 2019.

Governor Lewis thanked the Department of the Interior and the Casa Blanca Community School Owner’s Team for all the work that occurred to make the lease signing possible. Governor Lewis also

(More)



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acknowledged the work of the Community's federal team – Don Pongrace, Katie Brossy, and Denise Desiderio of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld who negotiated both the Gila Crossing Community School and Casa Blanca Community School leases.

Groundbreaking for the new Casa Blanca Community School is slated for October 10, 2020, with completion expected in August of 2021.

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The Gila River Indian Community is located on 372,000 acres in south-central Arizona and is home to the indigenous O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) people. The Tribe is comprised of seven districts. The administrative offices and departments are located in Sacaton and serve the people throughout these seven districts.

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