

Operation Spokane Heroes Spreads Holiday Cheer to Military Families

by Joe B. Wiles, 92nd ARW Public Affairs

Operation Spokane Heroes and the Kalispel Tribe of Indians joined forces again for the sixth year to bring holiday cheer to military families of the Inland Northwest. The two organizations presented to Col. Scott Hanson, the 92nd Air Refueling Wing commander, and senior representatives of other military branches, 500 family morale boxes for distribution to their troops.

In past years OSH and the Kalispel Tribe donated baskets containing food and holiday items. This year they prepared 500 popcorn gift boxes, reflecting the theme "Family Fun Night." The decorated gift boxes contained popcorn, playing cards, caramel corn, peanuts, a variety of other snacks, small games and a movie card good for a complimentary video rental. "There are a lot of organizations that already help with holiday meals. We didn't want to duplicate services," said Jennifer Simmons, public relations representative for OSH.



Once the gift boxes were presented to the military leaders, they were distributed to families of those that were currently deployed. According to Simmons, limiting the boxes to that group was in keeping with the true spirit of Operation Spokane Heroes. "Our mission is to support those who are left behind while their loved ones are serving our country," she said. The military community in the Inland Northwest includes the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, the Air Guard, Reserves and the Military Entrance Processing Station.

Operation Spokane Heroes is a cooperative partnership between Spokane Regional Chamber of Commerce, Spokane Armed Services Community, Spokane Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau, Global Credit Union, and Northern Quest Casino. The purpose of this partnership is to support armed services members of the Inland Northwest and their families through various means, such as business discounts, donations of goods and services, and moral support.

Prairie Island Indian Community and Treasure Island Donate over \$120,000 to Charity During Holiday Season



Left to right: Johnny Johnson, Tribal Council Secretary; Victoria Winfrey, Tribal Council Vice President; Alan Childs II, Tribal Council Treasurer; Audrey Bennett, Tribal Council President; Ron Johnson, Tribal Council Secretary/Treasurer.

Treasure Island Resort & Casino and the Prairie Island Indian Community donated over \$120,000 to a variety of charitable causes for the holiday season. The goal of the donations is to reach out to neighboring communities in the true spirit of giving.

The Prairie Island Indian Community kicked-off the season of giving with a large donation to Minneapolis American Indian Center. This organization serves nearly 20,000 Native Americans in Minnesota each year - many of whom live below the poverty line. In addition, Prairie Island donated to the Diversity Foundation. The Diversity Foundation is committed to bridging the gap between people caused by cultural and ethnic differences.

Treasure Island Resort & Casino and the Prairie Island Indian Community also donated much needed funds to area food shelves. This amount was divided equally between Hunger Prevention Council of Pierce County, Hastings Family Services food shelf program, Red Wing Area Food Shelf, Rochester's Channel One Emergency Food Bank and SEMCAC.

Prairie Island Indian Community happily matched Treasure Island's donation to the United Way of Goodhue, Wabasha & Pierce Counties. United Way's mission is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities.

In addition, Treasure Island also teamed up with several local radio stations to help their cause this holiday season. These programs invite listeners to contact the station with stories about their friends, family or neighbors who have come across difficult times. This allows the listener to help their neighbor through their struggles with the assistance of Treasure Island's donation. The idea behind these programs is to bring communities together for the holidays by lending a hand to one another.

The donations made are especially meaningful to the Tribe

because they understand the hardships many families face, which is particularly notable during the holiday season. Before Indian gaming was legalized, many tribal members were in need of the services provided by such organizations. Treasure Island and the Prairie Island Indian Community are proud that they can now give back to the people that had once shared with them in their time of need.

“Sharing is an integral part of our Native culture and during the holiday season it’s especially important to give back to the community and those in need,” said Prairie Island Tribal Council President Audrey Bennett.

FireLake Grand Casino Employees Show Love and Generosity



Left to right: Brad Peltier, FireLake Grand Casino Marketing & PR Director; Steve Degraffenreid, FireLake Grand Casino General Manager; Rose Lee Rush, Chairman of The Angel Tree Committee; Tim Morrison, Mission Specialist for The Salvation Army; and John A. Barrett, Chairman of The Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

FireLake Grand Casino, an enterprise of Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Oklahoma, held its first annual employee Christmas party last month. Employees donated over 1,000 toys and over \$2,000 to charities to help spread holiday cheer to those less fortunate. The Salvation Army and its Angel Tree Committee gladly accepted the vast array of new toys and nearly \$800 in cash donations. Other charities that received donations are The United Way, March of Dimes and Relay For Life.

“These toys are a blessing and we are glad to have a partner in the community like The Citizen Potawatomi Nation,” said Tim Morrison, Mission Specialist for The Salvation Army. “It is marvelous that there so many children that will benefit from the love and generosity of these employees,” added Rose Lee Rush, Chairman of The Angel Tree Committee.

Black Oak Casino Community Grab for Cash Brings Windfall to Area Non-Profits

Black Oak Casino invited 10 Tuolumne County charities and non-profits to participate in the recent 4th Annual Community Grab for Cash. Participating organizations took home more than

\$16,000, bringing the 4-year total to more than \$50,000.

“The Community Grab for Cash at Black Oak Casino is our way of kicking off the holiday season by giving back to the community,” said Ron Patel, Black Oak Casino General Manager. “It’s a fun opportunity for our local non-profit organizations to get some much needed financial support.”



Sue Adams of the Washburn Co. Food Pantry shows off some of the toys she received from the Gifts from the Heart toy drive. Also pictured is Mike Rogers of the St. Croix Casino.

A representative from each of the selected organizations has the opportunity to get in the casino's cash cube and grab as much of the whirling \$5,000 as they can in thirty seconds. The rewards of those moments in the cube can be seen in a number of ways in the Tuolumne community. “In the 30 seconds staff was doing the 'grab' the food bank received a total of \$2,380,” said Billie Westernoff, Program Director of HRC Community Services Program. “As funding gets more and more competitive, budgets get tighter and tighter and it gets harder and harder to make the food go as far as it needs to. The \$2,380 will go a long way in helping us to complete our goal of feeding the hungry in Calaveras County,” said Westernoff.

St. Croix Casino Gifts from the Heart Toy Drive Benefits Area Charities

Ever since 1993, the St. Croix Casino has helped to bring Christmas cheer to thousands of children. Through the Turtle Lake, WI casino's Gifts from the Heart toy drive, more than 70,000 toys have been collected and distributed to charities in northwestern Wisconsin. During this year's drive, the 14th annual, which ran from December 4 through December 9, more than 3,300 casino guests donated more than 5,000 toys.

Sharing the Christmas spirit through the Gifts from the Heart toy drive is a cooperative effort. It starts with the generosity of the casino's guests, who donate toys for the drive.

The generosity continues with the casino. First of all, the casino gives \$5 to each guest who donates a toy. Then there's the work of countless casino staff, who box and deliver toy donations. This year casino personnel delivered toys to 13 charities in Barron, Burnett, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer, St. Croix and Washburn counties. ♣