



The Navajo Times
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Relief effort draws help from many donors

By Noel Lyn Smith
Navajo Times

WINDOW ROCK, Feb. 4, 2010

Donations from businesses and organizations have played a major role in helping weather-impacted Navajos as the relief effort enters its third week.

National Relief Charities donated supplies to Chinle, Ts'ah bii Kin and Whippoowill chapters, along with a shipment to the Sichomovi Elderly Program on the Hopi Reservation, according to Helen Oliff, the organization's public relations manager.

Approximately 34,000 pounds of goods were sent, enough to help up to 2,100 people. Included were staples such as beans, rice and flour, along with non-perishable foods and beverages, including noodles, soup, MREs (meals ready to eat), water and tea. Also donated were personal hygiene items and each command post received first-aid kits.

National Relief Charities is a nonprofit that partners with programs on more than 75 reservations in the Southwest and the northern Plains. The organization formed a partnership with the Chinle Head Start six months ago and was contacted by the school for relief support.

"When a disaster hits in a community that is already struggling economically, it's that much tougher to deal with than it would be for another community," Oliff said.

This is not the first time the group has helped with relief efforts on the Navajo Nation. When a similar snowstorm hit in 2008, NRC donated approximately 5,000 pounds of food and water.

Also lending assistance was the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, which distributed beans, flour, potatoes and hay.

"We knew the snowstorm would be pretty heavy," said Tsosie Lewis, NAPI's chief executive officer.

When reports about the storm began, NAPI was preparing to donate but was not sure how big the demand would be, he said.

Hay was the most important product that NAPI distributed. When Lewis attended the Navajo Nation Council's winter session last week, he heard comments from delegates about starving livestock that could not forage because the snow had covered everything in a thick blanket.

Due to its size and weight, the hay took more time to reach some destinations, while some chapters went directly to NAPI to pick up their hay, Lewis said.

With the recovery effort now winding down, NAPI is gearing up to provide more assistance in case mud from melting snow extends the emergency.

"We'll see what happens when the snow melts. We're prepared to help again," Lewis said.

The American Red Cross donated cots and blankets to emergency shelters that were set up in some communities, while St. Mary's Food Bank donated a semi-trailer load of non-perishable food to the state Incident Command Post in Holbrook, Ariz. From there, the Arizona National Guard made deliveries to Chinle, Dilkon, Kayenta, Piñon, Tuba City, Window Rock and Kykotsmovi on the Hopi Reservation.

At last week's council session, Delegate Leslie Deal (Tonalea) recognized the financial assistance that Navajo Nation Shopping Centers Inc. provided to the relief effort.

Byron Hoskie, business development specialist with the company, said he received a request from the Navajo Nation Emergency Operations Center to help.

"Being a resident of here, seeing the weather conditions and the inclement weather, I know the severity was bad ... I can just imagine what it's like out there," Hoskie said.

The enterprise donated \$1,000 to help defray the cost of 7,000 gallons of water provided by Basha's supermarket in Window Rock.

"I regret that we didn't have any more money than we had. We didn't budget for more to address these emergencies," said Wilbur Nelson Jr., the company's chief executive officer. "Just like most department stores or enterprises we never look that far ahead into these kinds of (situations), we'll probably be addressing that in the future."

Other monetary donations given to the emergency relief effort included \$100,000 from Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise and \$10,000 from NOVA Corp.

"This casino is financed, owned and operated by the Navajo people (so) we should find a way to get them some immediate aid," gaming CEO Bob Winters told the council last week when delivering the gaming enterprise check.

Selena Manychildren, public information officer for the Emergency Operations Center, reminded people that their first point of contact for relief assistance is their chapter house.

There have been reports that some chapters were selling donated supplies to residents, according to a press release from the Emergency Operations Center.

Chapter houses are not to sell any donations and are to assist all livestock owners, regardless if they have a grazing permit or not, according the press release.

"If our donators find out about chapters selling donated items, they won't help us anymore," Manychildren said.

Manychildren advised people to report chapter sales of donated feed and hay to the Division of Natural Resources or the Department of Agriculture. Chapter presidents or council delegates can handle reports about the sale of other items.

Information: 928-871-6883 or 928-871-6918.