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Santa hears holiday wishes at DHRD

By Lailani Upham



Santa points out to the stack of stockings for seven-year-old Beavers to choose from after sharing her wish-list and striking a Christmas card pose. (Lailani Upham photo)

PABLO — Here came Santa Claus, right down Flathead lane last week at the old tribal complex for the annual Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Department of Human Resource Services Santa photo op and gift bag and cookie give away.

DHRD was keeping it real and down-home for the entire community with gifts for infants to elders, stuffed in the traditional stockings and backpacks for teens.

Over 1,000 gift bags were given out from age 0 to 100, all courtesy of several national and local donations, according to DHRD staffer, Sylvia Aimsback.

“All of the TANF and foster kids were on the list,” she said. “We squeezed in more stockings on the last day, but we made it,” she added.

Thanks to a donation from CSKT Tribal Council, more kids bags/stockings were scrambled together on the last day, according to Aimsback.

A nonprofit organization, the National Relief Charities (NRC) has been an ongoing donor for the CSKT DHRD program during Christmas. The organization has served Native communities for over 20 years and the only charity to work on over 75 reservations year-round. NRC considers their organization more of a partnership than a charity with a network of nearly 900 partnerships with reservation programs. NRC works through the partners to bring needed relief to over 300,000 reservation communities.

One Nation, another national charity organization donated items for a large array of gift bags, according to Aimsback.



Jodessa Senecal, Jaydence Senecal and Susan Pierre take a holiday group shot with Santa during the "DHRD Santa Visit." (Lailani Upham photo)

One Nation's mission is to help communities by providing medical aid, educational programs, and food supplies through local programs while crossing cultural barriers and respecting individual differences. The organization states they work to promote public awareness of the difficulties and aspirations of natives. The financial contributions and many donated goods come from businesses, churches, schools, clubs and organizations and individual families.

As usual many dedicated tribal employees brought in more than enough homemade cookies (and some store bought ones) for the two-day Santa visit.

CSKT Head Start classroom brought in their little ones along with hundreds of families in the community came by and were given a free framed photo taken with Santa.

Each year Aimsback sews blankets for the Christmas bags. Her goal is make a minimum of 50 blankets a month. The project is dependent on materials and money donated and fundraising, she said. However, raising money is time consuming and donations scarce at times and next year Aimsback predicts the blankets may not go out for the 2011 participants.

Regardless of the dull prediction, Aimsback said this year's event went really well and she received a special card with heartfelt thank you for taking the time to give.

The smiles and endless thank yous from the families and children is what makes each holiday event joyful and productive for the CSKT DHRD tribal employee helpers.

The CSKT Tribal Council and the entire CSKT employee staff would like to wish everyone a Happy Holiday.