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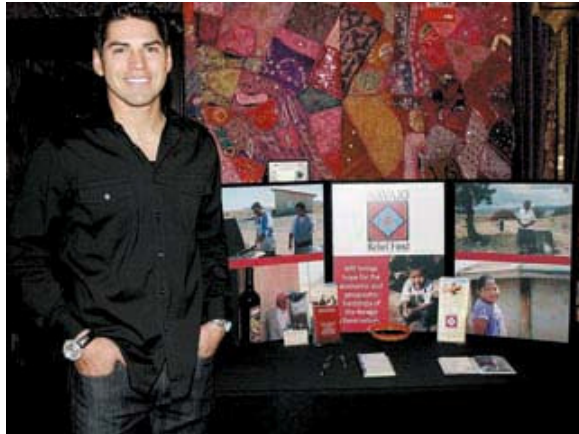


Photo courtesy Navajo Relief Fund and Jacoby Ellsbury

Jacoby Ellsbury with the Navajo Relief Fund display board.

Wine named after sox player to benefit Navajo charity

By Brenda Austin, Today correspondent

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PHOENIX – Boston Red Sox outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury, No. 2, is the first Native American of Navajo descent to reach Major League Baseball. Being blessed with the ability to be a professional athlete, Ellsbury, a member of the Colorado River Indian Tribes, wanted to find a way to give back.

He is now doing that through the sales of his new wine, ZinfandEllsbury – one of two new releases from Charity Wines. Partnering with several athletes, including eight current or former Red Sox players, Charity Wines created a vintage vino picked by Ellsbury with the proceeds going to three charities of his choice.

Sales of ZinfandEllsbury will provide support for the Navajo Relief Fund, Project Bread and the Ellsbury-Read Character Strength Project. While the last two will provide nourishment for New England children and promote child abuse prevention, the first of the three has a special place in his heart.

Spending time with his grandmother as a child on the Navajo Reservation, he watched her weave rugs and shear sheep in temperatures as high as 120 degrees with no air conditioning. A witness to the hard-working lifestyle and issues plaguing people on the Navajo Reservation, Ellsbury hopes to bring awareness and offer hope.

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According to Helen Oliff, public relations manager for National Relief Charities, the parent company for the Navajo Relief Fund program chosen by Ellsbury, the nonprofit is dedicated to improving the quality of life for American Indians living on reservations. Oliff is located out of NRC's southwest program office in Phoenix, which has a 40,000-square-foot distribution center serving more than 50 tribes regionally through NRF and other programs.

Services provided by NRF include emergency food boxes, community-wide food distributions, support for health programs, home repairs for elders and disaster relief during environmental emergencies. This past winter NRF was one of the first responders to the winter snowstorm that left several Navajo communities stranded. Food and other provisions were quickly provided using their on-hand inventory, trucks and partners on the reservations.

Ellsbury said that when Charity Wines approached him about having a wine sold under his name he jumped on it. The wine sells for \$14 a bottle and is carried by retailers in New England and is also available online at www.charitywines.com.

Charity Wines is a philanthropic division of the Massachusetts-based VinLozano Imports, Inc., which started the Longball Cellars brand to pair fine wine with great charities. The wine is produced by Clos LaChance winery out of San Martin, Calif. ZinfandEllsbury was launched with the help of Charity Hop Sports Marketing.

NRC works on more than 75 reservations offering services that benefit more than 300,000 American Indians a year. Through NRF, more than 25,000 people are served each year.

Oliff said, "I think it is great that Ellsbury is able to do something that gives back to the Navajo people. Not only will the proceeds from the sale of the wine help with program services we provide through NRF, but he has also helped to bring more attention to the conditions of the Navajo people. Most Americans are unaware of the true conditions that exist on the reservations."

For example, unemployment on the Navajo Reservation is between 40 and 50 percent. Nearly half of the high school students drop out due to obstacles such as poverty and lack of access. The suicide and diabetes rates are well above the national average.

Ellsbury said that seeing someone of Navajo descent playing in the majors gives children on the reservation hope, not only in sports but also in school.

This season has seen Ellsbury off and on the disabled list since being diagnosed with a hairline fracture in each of four ribs after his collision with third baseman Adrian Beltre in Kansas City April 11. According to the Boston Globe, although there has been improvement in the condition of Ellsbury's fractured ribs, he's still not ready for baseball activities.

As for the wine, ZinfandEllsbury is described as having hints of vanilla and white pepper, with aromas of cranberries, blueberries and cocoa. Looking forward to making a difference, Ellsbury said, "These charities are close to my heart."

