

Children's Christmas Party bigger, better than last year

By TJ SHOW
BLACKFEET TRIBAL CHAIRMAN
For The Glacier Reporter

We held the second annual Blackfeet Children Christmas Fund Party on Saturday, Dec. 31, at KW Bergan School and what a great day it was of fun, happiness and excitement for kids and grownups alike.

It was my great honor to be one of the many volunteers that helped out. Henry and I drew the task of greeting and checking in kids and putting numbered wristbands on them for the big drawing, and it was great fun for us. You should have seen our children's faces when they entered the cafeteria and saw 2,000 packages stacked in enormous piles - all lovingly gift wrapped over countless hours by nearly 100 Blackfeet. Rusty was there too and helped hand out gifts to the long lines of children and families that went out the door and around the building.

Our Christmas Party just keeps getting bigger and better. In 2010 we had it at the old Faught's building, which proved too small. In 2011 we moved it to KW Bergan, which is more than twice as large, and it was still too small. Looks like the only place big enough to hold it in 2012 is the old or new high school, so we are working on that.

Which brings me to a special, big thank you to Browning Public Schools. We had originally hoped to hold the party at the new Stick Game Arbor, but that didn't work out. At the last minute we had to scramble for an alternate location, and Browning Public Schools stepped in and saved the day. They offered us the largest facility available, which was KW Bergan. We didn't secure the school until Thursday, and that meant we



Every kid got a wristband with a lucky number for presents and prizes at Christmastime, and activities included all sorts of things, including dance numbers, at the second annual Blackfeet Children's Christmas Party.

had to move the party to New Years Eve. It also meant we had to cancel the free family holiday photos we had planned, but other than that the party went off as planned.

Once again, this event was paid for from generous donations from our friends around the world. I hope you will take a moment and go to www.blackfeetnation.com and click on "Donors List" to see the list of nearly 200 individuals and companies that helped give our children a brighter Christmas. Over 90% of our 2010 donors also contributed in 2011, which is an amazingly high number. Like I have said many times, there is an ocean of good will out there for Indians in general and the Blackfeet in particular, and our donors proved it once again.

This year many people were hurt by the bad economy, so many donors could send in just \$10 or \$20. But we actually raised more money than last year, for two reasons. First, we

had more donors, and second, in 2011 a handful of donors stepped in and made very large donations. I especially want to thank Newfield who donated an incredible \$5,000 and the Town Pump, Glacier Way C-Stores, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Blackfeet Housing and Blackfeet Police Force who all donated \$1,000 or more. I also want to thank KBWG 107.5 FM who got the word out about the party. As with last year, no money from Tribal Administration was used, and the vast majority of money came from private donors all around the world.

In 2011 we added several new aspects to the party. Manpower provided a large van which enabled us to shuttle kids from the Medicine Bear Shelter, to and from the party, and to take gifts and stockings to the Blackfeet Nurturing Center for the kids that could not come to the party.

There were two new features I really liked because we owe so much gratitude to our donors and volunteers. We had 20 fresh Christmas trees that we dedicated to our top donors. So when you walked around you saw a tree-topping star with the donor's name on it. Also, behind the stage where we displayed the major prizes for the drawing were large white boards with every donor's name written out, in no particular order.

This year, our crafts table was greatly expanded and hundreds of Blackfeet children made nice "Thank You!" crafts which we are sending to donors. We invited elders who got to watch the fun from the safety of bleachers and tables set aside for them. Volunteers walked around and gave the elders gifts, including beautiful incense pouches and silver bells.

It was great to see so many kids brought up in vans from Heart Butte and other outlying areas. Some got there a little late, but we knew they were coming so we postponed events so they would be included.

One of the liveliest and most fun new activities was a large dance contest and it was a blast watching our boys and girls, big and small, showing off their moves. As always, the big drawing capped off the party. This year, maybe 1,000 Blackfeet crowded around the stage breathlessly hoping their number would be called. We gave away bikes, Wiis, scooters, hockey tables, DVD players, sleds, boom boxes, giant playhouses and many other items.

Speaking of giant playhouses, I want to leave you with two stories to give you an idea of how much we owe our 100+ volunteers and how hard they all worked to give all our children their own special day, a mountain of gifts and prizes and a great party.

Late Thursday night, Gregg and his little girl Chenoa were driving back from Great Falls towing a large flatbed trailer loaded with pallets of toys from Sam's Club and WalMart (who have given us amazing, after-Christmas prices on toys which let us really stretch our budget). Right behind was a Manpower van, also full of gifts, carrying Alex, Elijah, Joe and Shawn, whose little boy

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Closing Date: Friday, January 13, 3 p.m. MST

Application procedures/materials are available at www.bfcc.org. For more information, contact Human Resource Director Dana Pemberton at 406-338-5441, ext. 2203, danalou@bfcc.org.

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Filing fees for the offices are:

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Candidate filing forms may be picked up at the Glacier County Courthouse, Clerk & Recorders Office and must be filed by 5 p.m. on Monday, March 12, 2012.

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