

Blackfeet Children Christmas Fund includes all foster homes in giving

By GREGG PAISLEY
For the Glacier Reporter

In December 2015, for the sixth consecutive year, the Blackfeet Children Christmas Fund delivered gifts to reservation children and their foster and group homes. Every year we have tried new things, fine tuning as we go. As a result, each year has been better than the year before in terms of reaching those children most in need of a brighter Christmas and a little happiness, excitement, fun, love and compassion.

This year we funded five separate events, objectives or requests.

First, we threw a big party in the atrium of Eagle Shield for children in the care of Blackfeet Child and Family Services. There are 100+ children either in the Nurturing Center or in foster homes, 60+ foster families, and an indeterminate total number of children living in those homes since many also include the parent's natural born children.

All were welcome, and we had enough presents for over 200 kids. We didn't want anyone to go away disappointed so we put all the presents on display unwrapped and let kids choose what they wanted, then gave them a Christmas gift bag to carry their loot around in. If we ran out of a particular gift, the kids had the option of ordering a replacement which would arrive in a few days.

An amazing thing happened the morning before the afternoon party began. We carried in all the boxes and as I was opening them, a pretty, slight elderly woman came out of her apartment to see what the fuss was all about. I explained what was planned for the day, and she asked to help. I said it would be great if she could unbox and put on display all the gifts while I set up other things. With hardly a word she set to work, and the beautiful layout, gift display and decorations were done 100% by her in two hours.

As the party wound down, parents, caregivers and case-workers sent well-mannered, well-spoken kids over to where I was sitting to thank me. It was wonderful to see adults teaching our children how to behave and be grateful and respectful. By the way, presents left over will be made available for birthdays. As you can see from the pictures, it was a lot of fun.

Second, we found that hard use and High Plains weather had wrecked most of the outdoor play equipment at the Nurturing Center. The big, commercial quality swing set-slide-monkey bar rig we gave them last year was still in good shape, but that was about it. So we bought a heavy duty basketball hoop, metal climbing dome and metal teeter-totter. We also bought indoor basketball hoops for both toddlers and older kids.

Third, we took about 100 gifts to Blackfeet Community Hospital for nurses and doctors to give to sick children in inpatient care. These presents were selected to be suitable for children confined to beds: lots of games, stuffed animals, puzzles and small toys. It will be interesting to see how long it takes the hospital to run out of gifts, but hopefully they will last for a few weeks.

Fourth, for children's school work, learning and entertainment we installed a Wi-Fi router in the Nurturing Center and bought tablets in kid-proof covers and also a PC. Also, like last year, we bought locally-made blankets to give to newly-arrived kids that they can take with them when they leave. Most kids in the Nurturing Center are either waiting for a foster home to open up, or their case is being adjudicated in Tribal Court. When they leave, caretakers would also like to send them off with kid's luggage and books. By the time we heard this request, most donor money was already spent, so we are now trying to raise ad-



The Blackfeet Children's Christmas Fund was another rousing success this year as outside donors made sure kids at the Nurturing Center and elsewhere got a great Christmas no matter what.

ditional funds for this.

Fifth, we got a last minute request to help out with a Browning-area dinner for young Blackfeet graduates of the Montana Youth Challenge Academy in Dillon. So we bought enough food to feed 100 young people.

Next year we plan to do the same sort of kids party as this year, but with more activities and entertainment and hopefully a booth to take free family Christmas pictures. As always, starting in November we will talk to the various Blackfeet entities, case workers, caregivers and families looking after our kids and find out what is most needed and wanted.

I went up to the Nurturing Center on New Year's Day to install the Wi-Fi router. Afterwards while sitting on the couch I found myself surrounded by beautiful, healthy, well-cared for little children. In the midst of that fun, one of the three caretakers on duty said, "You know, at the party a lot of families wondered who you are, why you do this and where the money comes from."

Well, okay, here's answers. I am enrolled Blackfeet (from both the Paisley and Guardipee families) and split my time between Browning and western Washington where my young children reside. I am mainly a dad and everything other role is a distant second. I retired a few years back from a long career in tech (e.g. Silicon Valley) and other industries. I have for decades worked on developing new ideas for economic development in Indian Country because clearly the old ideas don't work. A few years ago I partnered with the BTBC on some for-profit enterprises and non-profit projects but found that to be inefficient and onerous. So when the Council split and Tribal government melted down and became dysfunctional, I said "Oh, well" and carried on by creating sepa-

rate non-profits and for-profit enterprises on the reservation that, by now, have operated for years with no Tribal funds and no connection to Tribal government.

I am well known around the reservation for being outspoken (often in the form of essays in the *Glacier Reporter*) about how to improve our reservation economy and also in my criticism of Tribal government, i.e. That the Blackfeet Nation, like most tribes, has an inviolable local economy and reactive, untenable tribal governance, but on the bright side there are proven models to solve these problems if only we have the wisdom and will to change.

I spearhead projects like the Blackfeet Children Christmas Fund for the simple reason it is a good thing to do and because our many outside donors rely on us to do this sort of work. Plus, it makes me, our many volunteers and my family happy to do this sort of work. Simple as that. It is part of a larger vision embodied in the American Indian Partnership (which I founded a few years ago) that is leveraging the good will and resources of outsiders to do a range of good, important work on the reservation.

But it is the for-profit side that takes most of my time and resources, for example the Blackfeet Indian Market and Blackfeet Industries. If the Blackfeet Nation is to survive as a sovereign nation, let alone prosper, we must have a viable private sector economy, county or state. That requires multiple steady economic conduits to the outside world, both in the for-profit and non-profit realm. So we launch proof of concept projects and then build on those that work best. The two enterprises mentioned above have become regular operations that create jobs and have positive cash flows. And all the non-profit projects con-

sistently raise enough donor money to do measurable good on the reservation. So far, so good.

As to where the money comes from for the Blackfeet Children Christmas Fund, my family has historically put in several thousand dollars in cash and other resources to get things started every year, and then mainly between Thanksgiving and January hundreds of donors from around the world have provided the bulk of the funding. We don't ask for or receive money from the Tribe for our Christmas efforts. In fact, virtually no money comes from the reservation at all. We don't try to raise money locally since the idea is to build bridges to outside donors. We are all volunteers, and no one, including me, is paid wages for our non-profit work.

Thank You

The Heart Butte School, 21st Century Program and community want to thank all of you who helped and assisted in the Heart Butte Annual Christmas Powwow on Dec. 27 and 28. We called on the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council through our Heart Butte Representatives Forrestina Calf Boss Ribs and Nelse St. Goddard. The BTBC gave monetary support to the Powwow. The Blackfeet Tribal Johnson O'Malley Education Program through Harold Dusty Bull and staff assisted with monetary support. The Blackfeet Tribal Buffalo Program provided buffalo meat for the delicious Buffalo Stew, plus our 21st Century 6th grade Buffalo Hunters. The Heart Butte Senior Center partnered with the 21st Century Program; they provided the facility to do our cooking for the feed. Theda New Breast and Jay Young Running Crane did the

photo shoot, what great pictures. The drums were our own Heart Butte School "Lil Heart Butte." Kicking Women Drum, Turning Robe, Thunder Chief, Iron Creek, Young Grey Horse and Spotted Eagle Jr. There were wonderful old time Owl Dance and Rabbit Dance songs.

Thanks to all the Dancers, Golden Age, Veterans and audience for coming and making the powwow a wonderful time.

Thanks to the 21st Century Staff, our cooks Anna Bullshoe and Anne Pollock, all volunteer students, Amanda Big Head, Marsha Switzer, Mashayla Calf Boss Ribs, Tylinn Calf Boss Ribs, Raelynn Spotted Eagle, Shay England, Juan Torres, Louis B. and Nathan Racine. This was a job well done; thank you.

Remember, the 2016 Heart Butte Annual Christmas Powwow is Dec. 27 and 28. Everyone is welcome.

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For details, contact Susan Wilson
1.800.796.4567 ext 4133 • susan.wilson@3rivers.coop

Glacier County
Cut Bank, Montana

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County of Glacier
The opening for candidate filing for the June 2016 Primary Election is from January 14 - March 14, 2016. Pursuant to MCA 13-10-202(2) the filing fees are as follows:

Candidate Offices	Term	Filing Fees
Commissioner District III	6 year	\$234.85
Clerk of District Court	4 year	\$234.85

You may file at the Clerk & Records office at the Glacier County Courthouse until 5 p.m. on Monday, March 14, 2016.

Contact:
Glenda M. Hall, Election Administrator
512 East Main Street, Cut Bank, MT 5427
406-873-3609
406-873-3613 fax

MNAXLP

2929 3rd Avenue North Suite 300 Billings, MT 59101 (406) 294-7994

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Thursday, Jan. 28

Registration is onsite and we welcome you to attend this event.
For additional information contact Stephen Fox at 406-399-0129 or Robert Much at 406-442-8543
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