

Group serves food to Native communities

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Building strong, self-sufficient American Indian communities' is the motto for National Relief Charities, a non-profit group based in Phoenix, Ariz. Their mission is to help Native American people improve the quality of their lives by providing opportunities for them to bring about positive changes in their communities.

This explains why NRC are providing 60,000 meals on more than 20 reservations in the Southwest and northern plains this Thanksgiving season. Of those, 9,000 are in New Mexico on nine reservations and approximately 500 of those hot meals were served last week in Zuni and To'hajiilee.

"NRC offers its Thanksgiving services to ensure that remote and needy families are able to gather together and participate in the major holidays along with the rest of America," said Helen Oliff, public relations manager. She was in Zuni in early November as the NRC truck arrived to unload the holiday food at the senior center. The center served a hot Thanksgiving meal, thanks to the NRC, to more than 250 people on Nov. 17. and 150 meals were served to seniors who couldn't make it to the center. The group also served 100 meals in To'hajiilee.

Zuni Senior Center Elderly Services Director Karen Leekity said, "I suggested the seniors invite family members to share in the Thanksgiving meal." Leekity's goal is to create the opportunity for a shared experience between elders and youth, "In the hopes of inspiring our future shared experiences between elders and family. Family members will also learn more about the elders by seeing them in their element at the senior center where they participate in non-food activities, exercise, education and awareness classes and have a sense of belonging," she emphasized. "This is more than just a meal."

To'hajiilee residents enjoyed their Thanksgiving meal this week.

NRC provides food for Native American senior centers all year round, "We assure seniors one good hot meal a day five days a week," said Leekity, "approximately 24,000 meals a year at the center and 11,000 on wheels.

"The partnership between the NRC and the Zuni Senior Center has been there for many years," said Leekity who has been with the center for 20 years. "Beans and rice can go a long way," she added with a smile. The charity program works through reservation departments year-round to distribute staple foods, fresh and frozen produce, breakfast foods, pantry foods, winter emergency food and holiday meals, said Oliff.

The NRC consists of 700,000 donors, "Americans who care about the quality of life on reservations," said Oliff. The organization has been serving Native American communities for 20 years. It is unique as it has a highly effective warehouse and distribution system that trucks more

than four million pounds of material aid each year to remote reservation communities that most Americans never see and most organizations cannot reach. “We ship directly into the hands of the people who need them,” Oliff as she prepared to leave Zuni.

You can find out more about the NRC online at nrcprograms.org.

Oliff noted that that the Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna were not part of the NRCs Thanksgiving effort, however, they are included in the Christmas program next month.

For more information about the Zuni Senior Center, call Director Karen Leekity at 1-505-782-5541.