

The spirit of giving

Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians sponsors range of events in San Jacinto Valley, from Ramona play to youth sports

By HAN KWAK

The Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians has been receiving attention for its \$400,000 June donation to the Hemet Public Library, but the tribe's spirit of giving has been felt for years in the San Jacinto Valley.

The Soboba name and marquee can be found on many of the events in the area, thanks to the tribe's sponsorship of the annual Ramona Outdoor Play and special events such as the visit of the Vietnam War Memorial Moving Wall to San Jacinto.

The tribe's donations are also felt on a smaller level, and a room at the tribal hall is decorated with plaques of appreciation from youth sports programs.

Andrew Masiel, the tribal administrator, said the success of the Soboba Casino has made the contributions possible.



DeeAnn Bradley/The Press-Enterprise
The Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians' tribal council holds up plans for the Hemet Public Library before a meeting. Including the library donation, the tribe has given about \$1.6 million to sponsorships and charitable causes.

"We had the desire but not the resources to participate," he said of contributing to community events and charitable causes. "But now it's different."

Phillip Frazer, the tribe's chief financial officer, said the casino does not release revenue figures for competitive reasons.

Since 2000, the tribe has donated about \$1.6 million to sponsorships and charitable causes, including the library donation. Masiel said over 70 percent of the money donated went to local causes. Contributions made before 2000 were not kept in the current records, he said.

Although he estimates that the tribe receives about 10 requests per week from various organizations, Masiel said the Soboba Band

prefers to help those in Hemet, San Jacinto and outlying areas of Riverside County.

Tribal Vice Chairwoman Rosemary Morillo said by telephone that the tribe has concentrated donations to its neighbors because of past generosity before the tribe's bingo and casino operations took off in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

"It comes from a lot of years of people giving us things," Morillo said, recalling past Christmases where tribal members would receive gifts for their families. "People would donate oranges, candy, dolls for the girls, a bike for the boys. . . . Now we're able to return that gesture that was given to us."

One of the biggest gifts over the past few years was the donation last August of \$10,000 each to the football programs of San Jacinto, Hemet and West Valley high schools, Noli and Hamilton schools, and Mt. San Jacinto College.

Valley-Wide Recreation and Parks District's youth sports program also benefited from Soboba participation, said general manager Sam Goepf, when reached by telephone. He estimated that 600 youths benefit from tribal contributions that range from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year.



DeeAnn Bradley/The Press-Enterprise
The tribal council of the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians, from left, treasurer Pamela Miranda, secretary Rose Salgado, Vice Chairwoman Rosemary Morillo, tribal member Freda Miranda and Chairman Robert Salgado Sr. prepare to meet. In June, the tribe donated \$400,000 to the Hemet Public Library.



DeeAnn Bradley/The Press-Enterprise
Andrew Masiel, tribal administrator, credits the success of the Soboba Casino for helping make the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians' donations possible.

But the tribe does not just limit itself to writing checks; it has been making an effort to participate as well, with tribal history presentations planned and encouraging tribal youths to participate in sports.

Patti Drusky, chief executive officer of the Hemet-San Jacinto Chamber of Commerce, said by telephone that in addition to sponsoring chamber events, the tribe also donated space and staff for the chamber's annual community fair.

"They're always willing to hold their hand out to the community," Drusky said. "It is a lifestyle and a philosophy of being part of the community."

Masiel said the tribe wants to be a visible part of

the community, not only because of its proximity to Hemet and San Jacinto, but because its customers and employees are also a reflection of the surrounding communities.

"It is the community in which we post our business and our existence," he said. "You give back to the community that you serve."