

Tribe continues tradition with donation of turkeys

MORONGO BAND: More than 3,000 birds are delivered to charities and groups in the county.

By STEVE FETBRANDT / *The Press-Enterprise*



Steve Fetbrandt/The Press-Enterprise

Morongo Band of Mission Indians tribal member George Cook and his wife, Valerie, right, open up a box to hand out free turkeys at Cabazon Elementary School. The free turkeys come a week after the tribe donated \$1 million to the American Red Cross.

Tribal member George Cook said the donation is just another way of giving something back to the community. He and his wife helped hand out the gifts.

"We wanted to reach out to people who have a need at this time of the year. I'd personally like to see more of this from the tribe," he said.

Cook's wife, Valerie, said she most enjoyed seeing the tribal members, people from the community and Morongo employees come together to make this year's program successful.

Kim Mayhood arrived early with her 4-year-old daughter, Hayli, and was one of 200 people to get a turkey. Mayhood, whose 7-year-old daughter Elexus, attends the school, described the donation as a generous gesture by the tribe. Principal Curtis added that the tribe is always there to help his school and students anyway it can.

CABAZON - Principal John Curtis broke into an ear-to-ear grin as the refrigerated truck pulled into the parking lot of Cabazon Elementary School Friday afternoon.

It was just a couple of months ago the Morongo Band of Mission Indians donated more than \$50,000 in much-needed playground equipment to his school. While Friday's delivery was quite different, Curtis and the family members standing in small groups nearby were just as appreciative.

In the largest giveaway of its kind since starting the tradition in the 1980s, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians delivered more than 3,000 turkeys to 37 charities and other organizations throughout Riverside County this week. The donations are expected to provide holiday meals for nearly 15,000 people.

The turkey donations follows a \$1 million gift from Morongo to the Riverside Chapter of the American Red Cross two weeks ago. The tribe contributed more than 6,000 early Thanksgiving meals for local families displaced by the recent Southern California fires.

Tribal Council member Anne Hutton and other tribal members also delivered more than 140 boxes of Thanksgiving dinner ingredients to the families of the Torres-Martinez tribe.

In a prepared statement, tribal leaders said the giveaway was their way of continuing a tradition that started 380 years ago when Wampanoag Indians of Massachusetts helped the Pilgrims survive their harsh first winter and, harvest time, brought food for a thanksgiving celebration.

"We are honoring the spirit of that original Thanksgiving with this donation," Hutton said. "The Morongo Indians know and understand what difficult times are all about.

"Like many of the families we are trying to help, our struggles are far from over. But this holiday is a good place to start building new friendships."