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Pechanga makes generous donation to Boys & Girls clubs

By: DEIRDRE NEWMAN - Staff Writer

TEMECULA ---- The Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest County's effort to build two new buildings received a generous donation Thursday when the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians donated \$1.5 million to the cause. The clubs provide after-school programs and activities for more than 3,300 children.

Pechanga has been donating to schools and other entities since a year after it started offering gaming in 1995. Thursday's donation marked a new zenith. It's the tribe's largest, single donation to a building effort ever, said Amy Minniear, second vice president of Pechanga Development Corporation.

The tribe announced the donation in the framed structure that will be a club building at Kent Hintergardt Memorial Park. The money mainly will be used to finish building this facility and to help construct another club building in French Valley on Winchester Road, said Michelle Arellano, president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest County.

"Pechanga has taken a leadership role and set an example to build infrastructure for kids for many years to come," Arellano said.

The tribe is able to be so generous because of the revenue its casino takes in, but the tribe is much more than the casino, said John Palinkas, secretary-treasurer of Pechanga Development Corporation.

"People often think of Pechanga as a casino and a business," Palinkas said. "Then when you hear things like this, they think we're good corporate citizens. First and foremost, we're a people and we're doing what's neighborly."

In contributing to the clubs, the tribe aligned itself with a long tradition of tribal members, said Patrick Murphy, president of Pechanga Development Corporation.

"Our ancestors taught us to share our bounty with those less fortunate and vulnerable," Murphy said. "Today, Pechanga is blessed to have the resources to share with those in need."

The 5,500-square foot building at the park will cost about \$1.2 million to build and ultimately serve about 1,500 kids each year, Arellano said. It's anticipated to be finished this spring, she added. The French Valley building, which will be located near Algarve Avenue, is expected to

serve 5,000 kids. Riverside County donated the 8-acre parcel of land, which is worth about \$6 million, Arellano said. It will cost about \$4 million to build a 15,000-square-foot facility there, she added.

With its donation, the Pechanga tribe got the opportunity to name the two buildings. The one in the park will be called the Pechanga Great Oak Boys & Girls Club. The French Valley building, which will also include a gym, hasn't been named yet, said Chris Olsen, chairman of the clubs' board of directors.

The Boys & Girls clubs of Southwest County is in the early stage of a capital campaign where it hopes to raise more than \$16 million, said Terry Gilmore, one of the co-chairs of the campaign. An auction Saturday evening is expected to raise more than \$600,000, he said.

At Kent Hintergardt Park on Thursday, Tim Schweiger was kicking around a soccer ball with his 4-year-old son, Nick. He said he's looking forward to the club building being finished. When he heard about the Pechanga donation, he said he wasn't surprised.

"They do a lot of donating," he said. "That's nice of them."

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