

## News Release

For more information:

Charles Denight, 541-966-1973, [charles.denight@wildhorseresort.com](mailto:charles.denight@wildhorseresort.com)



Students at the CTUIR After School program, left, and Sherwood School third-graders, right, show off their grocery bag artwork. Over 55 of the bags were retrieved with groceries in a food collection drive by employees at Wildhorse Resort & Casino.

Note: These photos are available in a resolution suitable for printing. If you would like to use one, just reply to this email.

When Wildhorse Resort & Casino recently marked its 13th anniversary with a program of "13 Good Works", over 400 employees volunteered their personal time to help a community non-profit organization. And add to that nearly 200 students in schools from Paterson, Washington to Pendleton and Mission.

“We were having trouble deciding which project to take on,” noted Wildhorse employee Stephanie Barkley, “when I called the Nixyaawi School to see if they needed help. I was talking to the principal, Fjell Ley, and she said, ‘Actually, when you find a project, our students would like to help.’”

It was one of the unforeseen consequences of the 13 Good Works program, developed by Wildhorse’s marketing department. Wildhorse is marking its 13th anniversary in March and wanted to offset any possible negative effect of an anniversary of the 13th kind. Wildhorse departments sat down and debated which “good work” each would pursue, and then let the employees make the choice. Having school students help with the projects was the icing on the cake.

Barkley continued to call, approaching the CTUIR next on the subject of watershed restoration. Her contact suggested that, instead, her group provide help to the Tribes’ Native Plant Nursery. And so it wasn’t long before casino general manager Al Tovey was bent over a “huge pile of dirt”, according to Barkley, shoveling it into a wheelbarrow to move to a planting area. Then the students from Nixyaawii showed up and took the shovel from his hands. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen Al so happy,” she said with a laugh.

But Tovey and the others in their group spent the rest of a cold and rainy Monday—“we even got hailed on!”—planting dozens of bushes around the nursery, transplanting hundreds of cottonwood seedlings, cleaning out greenhouses, and otherwise making the Native Plant Nursery shine.

Not only did the students help with the heavy lifting, fulfilling part of a 32-hour community service graduation requirement, but the staff at the nursery got in a few education licks, teaching the students the names of plants, their uses, and how to care for them. One receptive student was even offered a summer job at the nursery—paid!

In another example of student support, students from Paterson Elementary School in Paterson, Washington, Sherwood School in Pendleton, the CTUIR After School Program and the Átaw Miyánašma Childcare Center beautifully decorated paper grocery bags with student artwork. Then Wildhorse volunteers used the bags to collect food for the Pendleton Salvation Army’s Food Bank. The food collection project, a joint effort of the marketing and human resources departments, collected in Pendleton and in Hermiston, the latter for the Stanfield Food Bank.

According to Tracy Cooper, a graphic designer in the Wildhorse marketing department and a resident of Paterson who is active with the town’s school, the local superintendent of the school, Peggy Douglas, has a broad view of community and was delighted to volunteer her students to provide an artistic touch to the grocery bags.

Robin Alexander, Human Resources Benefits Coordinator, contacted Sherwood School and the CTUIR After School Program. “They were wonderful to work with,” she said, “and the kids had so much fun. We thought it would help to give the bags a personal

touch if they were decorated by the school kids.”

The art apparently had the desired effect. With the help of students from the Sunridge Leadership Project, Alexander said her group collected 55 bags of food in Pendleton, “many of them filled to the top!” Those collecting the food included Alexander, Suzanne Clem and Katherine Burke of the Human Resources Department at Wildhorse. The students helping were Jordan Hillmick, Whitney Hillmick, Haley Fetterhoff, Gabrielle Heehn and Bailey Hillmick.

Others from the marketing and human resources departments spent a part of their Saturday standing at the entrances of the Wal-Marts in Pendleton and Hermiston, and the Safeway in Hermiston, collecting food in barrels. During two, two-hour shifts on a cold and rainy day the retailers’ customers donated nearly 10 barrels of groceries to the volunteers.

Meanwhile, the stalwart staffs from the Security Department and Wildhorse’s golf course spent two days raking leaves, pulling weeds, cutting down trees and otherwise tidying the play area at the Mission Adventist School.

According to Steve Winn, Security Department director, the volunteers worked in two, four-hour shifts to clean up about five acres at the school. One side effect—“Our backs were hurting all weekend!” Winn laughed as he recalled, “fighting the weather, with rain, wind. But we really wanted to do something for the kids.” Those kids came out during their breaks and watched the workers—who filled their shifts on a Wednesday and Thursday—but didn’t interrupt. “We’d do it again,” Winn said. “It was definitely worth it.”

Not all the projects involved young people. The Finance and IT departments teamed up to provide entertainment at assisted living facilities.

So successful were they that, according to Cal Tyer, the Revenue Audit Manager in Finance, “one of the centers, Elizabethan Manor, invited us to come in monthly and we’re considering it.” The volunteers staged casino nights or bingo at Elizabethan Manor, Juniper House and Sun Ridge Retirement, entertaining from 20 residents to over 30 at Sun Ridge.

“They really promoted the fact that we were coming from Wildhorse so the residents were expecting that the bingo would be extra special,” said Tyer.

Wildhorse had at least 10 employees at each facility during the events, calling out numbers, helping residents with their cards and giving out prizes. Were they professional dealers? “Absolutely not!” Tyer said. “We made a few mistakes and everyone just pointed them out and hooted.” According to Tyer the Wildhorse employees had as much fun as the residents. “Definitely, a good time was had by all.”

In other efforts, employees turned to their competence as bakers to raise money for a

good cause. The Wildhorse Gift Shop got together with the staff from the Children's Entertainment Center, the Hotel, RV Park and Administration offices and baked, then sold their products at four bake sales held at the CTUIR Administration offices and at Arrowhead. They donated the proceeds to the Tribal Child Care Center for playground equipment and bought a Tribal Flag for the Head Start program. They've also been volunteering to read to children at the After School program. They kept donation buckets at both Arrowhead and Mission Market for the playground equipment through March. Near the end of the month they had raised over \$450.

The employees with perhaps the most expertise at raising money, the table games staff, raised \$1,015 with a raffle one Saturday for the Pendleton High School students traveling to Minamisoma, Japan in July. A total of 26 volunteers (eight associated with the students) put in 56 hours at three collection stations: Wal-Mart (\$320), Albertson's (\$332) and Safeway (\$363).

The exchange program, under the guidance of the city of Pendleton, requires each of the six students and their chaperone to put up \$200, and then raise another \$1,200 by July when they leave for three weeks in Japan. The City pays the balance of the cost through the Pendleton Cultural Foundation. In September, the Japanese students and their chaperone visit Pendleton for three weeks. Anything in excess of the \$1,200 gives the students spending money and money for necessary gifts for their Japanese hosts.

The food and beverage department at Wildhorse may have hit a home run with the first of their two projects. Unlike some of the other groups, they picked a beautiful day for a ball game, when five managers and 12 of their staff rolled out the wheelbarrows, picked up a hoe and began weeding, sweeping and raking the Pendleton Little League fields.

"It was a lot harder than we thought it was going to be," said Carolyn Gimble, food and beverage manager. "We edged four diamonds and most of our people had never done that kind of edging before. But we enjoyed being outside on a nice day and yes, I think we'd do it again."

For their second project the food and beverage staff will stain the deck and paint the front stairs at Tonya's House in Pendleton. All they need is a little cooperation from the spring weather.

Wildhorse Resort & Casino is the Pacific Northwest's highest paying casino, with a record \$9.3 million slot jackpot. The Resort includes a 24-hour casino, five restaurants including the new buffet restaurant, *Traditions*, and new fine-dining restaurant, *Plateau*, the *Players* lounge, weekly live entertainment in the *Wildfire Cabaret*, hotel, RV Park, 18-hole golf course and Tribal museum. It is located just minutes off I-84 at Exit 216, four miles east of Pendleton. For more information: 1-800-654-9453 or [www.wildhorseresort.com](http://www.wildhorseresort.com). Wildhorse is owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

###