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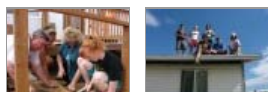
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# Teens' service benefits tribe

Nancy Spurlock, Uintah Basin Standard



Rev. Gregg Presnal, left, and Uintah Basin Association of Governments Executive Director Laurie Brummond help Lauren Freier of Ellsworth, Wis., and Holly Horn of Lancaster, Calif., construct a wheelchair ramp during a youth service project on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation.



More than 111 teenagers from a Colorado-based foundation spent last week working on various construction and home improvement projects at 22 homes on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation.

Ute Tribe member and grant writer Crystal Adams worked closely with the Group Workcamps Foundation to select the homes that would be improved.

"They actually have to be elderly, low income or disabled," Adams said of the homeowners. "They also have to fill out an application in order to get service. The Ute Tribe itself is really appreciative of these young people, and what they're doing."

The program, now in its 10th year is sponsored by the Utah Division of Housing and Community Development, which partnered with Uintah Basin Association of Governments and the national Group Workcamps Foundation. This is the project's first year visiting the Ute Reservation.

"We have 111 youth here this week," GWF manager Bob Turley said. "We have around 55 of these projects this summer with around 23,000 participants."

The volunteers at the camps are members of church youth groups from all denominations.

"This is a senior high camp, ages 14 to 20," GWF director and master of ceremonies Tim Kurth said. "The kids here this week come from six different churches and four different states."

Each individual raises \$400, and at their own expense, travels to their assigned project in communities located across the United States where they'll spend a week volunteering their labor and time. Some of the money they raise will buy the supplies to build

wheelchair ramps, replace roofs, paint, and construct decks, porches, and steps on the homes they're working on.

"This is my first time at the camp," said Ramiah Rhay, a 16-year-old from Antelope Valley, Calif. "It feels good to get your hands dirty and do some work."

The youth spend all year fundraising and preparing for their trip. Once on site, they practically work non-stop just to be able to finish the project and help the people whose homes they've repaired.

"They're doing really good," said Ute Tribe member Celina Poowegup. "I got to interact with the kids and the supervisors who are here with them. I got to know about where they're from. People should apply for the programs that are offered."

When the group had finished with Poowegup's home they had fixed her roof, painted the exterior of her home, her kitchen, dining and living room.

"There's probably not a better feeling to have than when you're going in to provide a service to a family that's so appreciative," said UBAOG Executive Director Laurie Brummond. "Nothing gives you a better, more rewarding feeling than that. Plus it gives us the opportunity to come back and do weatherization on each of these homes."

The Weatherization Program was created in 1976 by the U.S. Department of Energy in response to the national energy crisis. It pays for home improvements aimed at helping low-income households reduce their energy consumption.

"Group work camps and weatherization have worked together for years," said UBAOG Weatherization coordinator Korey Farnsworth. "What we'll try to do is come in and weatherize a home after these group work camps are done. We just try to make the house more energy efficient and help them with their bills."

UBAOG energy specialist Jim Gordon was an instrumental in getting the GWF program to come to the reservation after seeing the results of the group's work on other tribal lands.

"We've seen the positive effects of the group in southern Utah over the last few years so we thought we'd get it up here," he said. "It's such a positive program. It shows how good people are and how people are willing to help each other."

It took a couple of years to bring the project to the Uintah Basin though. Not only did the proper government agencies have to get together to make it happen, finding a place for the youth to stay was critical.

"Jim met with the (Duchesne County) school district," Brummond said. "The school district played a very intricate part in it."

Last week, Union High School became a home away from home for the volunteers.

"The kids sleep in the gym on air mattresses," Kurth said. "GWF hires some of the school staff to cater to the group."

Traditionally GWF will build a cross as part of their visit to a community, but due to the economic downturn the organization decided to have a canned food drive instead.

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"We invited over 23,000 participants to bring canned goods from their churches," Kurth said as he stood on the Union High stage last week. It was filled with canned goods.

"We're well over 30,000 cans nationwide and these we'll give to the food bank at UBAOG. So this is one more thing we can do for the community," he added.

The Duchesne County Area Chamber of Commerce wanted to return the favor and contributed insulated lunch totes filled with a snack, water, a pen, and postcards for the volunteers.

"It's just our way of saying thank you and showing our appreciation," chamber member Darlene Garrison said. "We just love doing things like this to let people know that when they come to visit our county we appreciate them being here that we want them to leave with good feelings."

A plan to have the group return for the next three years is already in the works.

"We want to expand the service all over the Basin to both tribal and non-tribal residents," Brummond said. "It's really amazing what they're doing, and we look forward to having them back."

### Keywords

Group Workcamps Foundation, Utah Division of Housing and Community Development

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