



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MacDonald-Lone Tree, Office Depot Foundation deliver 4,000 school backpacks to Tuba City

"By creating this partnership with the Office Depot Foundation, MacDonald-Lone Tree is demonstrating her commitment to increasing the quality of education for children on the Navajo Nation."

— Lawrence T. Morgan, Speaker of the 21st Navajo Nation Council

TUBA CITY, Ariz. — For most students, back-to-school is a highlight to the end of the summer. It's a time when there are special trips to load up on the newest and coolest fall school supplies for the year. But for some students, it can be a time of embarrassment because there are families that cannot afford even basic school supplies.

"The number of children in need of basic school supplies is astonishing," said Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree, council delegate for Tonanees'dizi (Tuba City). Nationwide studies report that children unable to afford school supplies often miss class frequently for the first few weeks, hoping their lack of supplies will be less obvious.

"As Navajo people, we stress the importance of education, but we need to give our children the tools they need to succeed," MacDonald-Lone Tree said. "Studies show that when a child has even the most basic school supplies, their attendance and grades increase."

Well aware there are many families who cannot afford adequate school supplies for their children, MacDonald-Lone Tree began working closely with the Office Depot Foundation last year. The foundation provides backpacks with essential school supplies to non-profit organizations and schools across the U.S. and Canada through the 2008 Office Depot Foundation National Backpack Program. The recipients, in turn, give the backpacks to children they serve in classrooms and through social service programs. In the eight years of this program, Office Depot has donated nearly 1.8 million backpacks.



The Office Depot Foundation in cooperation with Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree and several agencies delivered nearly 4,000 backpacks to schoolchildren in Tuba City, Ariz. on Aug. 11, 2008. Pictured in top photo is Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree, Stephen Jordan with Office Depot and Gary Davis. Bottom photo, schoolchildren return to school with their new backpacks. (Photos by Kenji Kawano)

MacDonald-Lone Tree learned about the Office Depot Foundation through the National Foundation for Women Legislators, where she serves on the executive board. She began working to get them to come to the Navajo Nation

and last Monday, Aug. 11, her efforts came to fruition when the foundation's vice-president, Stephen Jordan, personally delivered 4,000 backpacks to the Tuba City Community Center.

"By placing backpacks containing essential school supplies into the hands of children, we are giving them important tools they need to start school with confidence and to succeed throughout the year," Jordan said.

Students ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade were bused in from nearby schools to choose between green, purple, orange and the most popular backpack color this season — pink.

"They enjoyed it; they were really excited they could pick out the color that they wanted," said Theresa Hatathlie, Program and Project Specialist for the Tonanees'dizi Boys and Girls Club. The backpacks contained a pencil pouch, ruler, crayons, glue stick, pen, pencil, pencil sharpener and an eraser.

As soon as students received their bags, they quickly opened them to compare the contents. Some parents who have children in boarding school also stopped by to pick up bags for their children.

Hatathlie said some parents were as ecstatic about the bags as the children were and expressed sincere gratitude. Some commented it was a tremendous help since the high cost of fuel and food has left them very little for school supply shopping.

Exactly 2,504 backpacks were distributed last week, and the rest will be delivered to schools this coming week. The foundation said this has been the first time they have donated bags to the Navajo Nation. Hatathlie said she has already seen many of students walking home with the new bags on their backs and is looking forward to passing out the rest.

"I work with a lot of kids who are on the brink of success and something like this just kind of wipes away all the challenges you have to face," she said. "It was a community partnership, but Hope MacDonald-Lone Tree is the one who made the initial contact. We were like the elves who delivered the bags."

MacDonald Lone Tree extends her gratitude to the following programs for their tireless efforts in assuring that every student was provided a backpack: the Boys and Girls Club, Navajo Nation Behavioral Health Services, Tuba City Unified School District, the Health Promotions program at the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation, the National Foundation for Women's Legislators and the Office Depot Foundation.

The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan complimented MacDonald-Lone Tree for making the connections to bring the Office Depot Foundation to the Navajo Nation and for staying on task to ensure our children are equipped with the necessary supplies for their education.

"With this generous donation, 4,000 of our Navajo children will start the school year on the right foot," Speaker Morgan said. "By creating this partnership with the Office Depot Foundation, MacDonald-Lone Tree is demonstrating her commitment to increasing the quality of education for children on the Navajo Nation."

The remainder of bags will be distributed by the Boys and Girls Club on Monday, August 25, 2008.

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