



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Council Delegate MacDonald Lone Tree delivers 4,000 new backpacks to Western Navajo students for second year

TUBA CITY, Ariz. — For the second year, thousands of children on the western portion of the Navajo Nation were given brand new school backpacks, thanks to Navajo Council Delegate Hope MacDonald LoneTree, the Office Depot Foundation and the National Foundation of Women Legislators.

Students ranging from kindergarten to the sixth grade gathered at the Tuba City Community Center eager to receive their new bags with school supplies.

Last year, the Navajo Nation became the first tribe in the country to participate in this donation program and they received a total of 4,000 backpacks. Since 2001, the Office Depot Foundation has organized the National Backpack Program and they strongly believe it makes a difference in a child's academics by boosting their self-esteem and by building self confidence.



Hope MacDonald LoneTree, Navajo Council Delegate, welcomes hundreds of school children to an event that provided 4,000 backpacks to children in the western portion of the Navajo Nation. Left to right: William Higgins, superintendent for the Tuba City Unified School District; Dennis Bowen, Hope MacDonald LoneTree, Gary Davis and Peter MacDonald Sr.



(Photos by Christian Bigwater)

It's for the kids, some of whom are not able to afford school supplies," said Hope MacDonald LoneTree, Navajo Council delegate for the Coalmine Canyon and TohNaneesDizi Chapters. "It warms my heart to see happy children and to also see that this program helps eliminate that burden of school supply costs, which often gets in the way of a child's learning."

The national economy has had some effects on this year's program.

"This year was hard because of the national economy," MacDonald LoneTree said. "We are lucky to serve the same schools we did last year, and with the same amount of backpacks as we did before."

The National Backpack Program has had a positive impact on the community.

"This year, our scores for the Tuba City Unified School District went way up," said William Higgins, superintendent for the Tuba City Unified School District, on student performance. "I think part of it was because of those backpacks."

Evelyn B. Yazzie, a fourth grade teacher at the Eagle's Nest Intermediate School agrees with Higgins.

"Students need school supplies and most of them don't have the supplies they need, including a backpack," Yazzie said. "It effects their learning when they have nothing to carry their homework in. The program even helps me as a teacher, because the backpacks help the students stay organized."

This year, the national program provided more than 300,000 new backpacks to non-profit organizations, schools and agencies across the United States, as well as to other countries around the world. The program is now in its ninth year and the foundation will be reaching a significant milestone of donating more than two million backpacks since its inception.

MacDonald LoneTree appreciates the help of the various programs that collaborated efforts to make this program successful, she thanked the TohNaneesDizi Boys and Girls Club, the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention program at the Tuba City Regional Health Care Center, the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services, the Navajo Office of Youth Development, Coconino County Alliance Against Drugs, and the Tuba City Unified School District. She also expressed her appreciation to the National Foundation for Women Legislators and the Office Depot Foundation for including students in Indian Country -- particularly the Navajo Nation.

"This community partnership is important," MacDonald LoneTree said. "We invite wellness programs in the region to promote their causes. We set up the event with various health programs, so they have the opportunity to promote health and substance abuse prevention with the children."

MacDonald LoneTree's goal is to increase the amount of donations to the program, so that every student who needs school supplies on the Navajo Nation is able to receive a new backpack with supplies.

Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan commended MacDonald LoneTree for her continued efforts to improve the lives of the Navajo people and especially the youth.

"Once again, thanks to the various organizations and to Mrs. MacDonald LoneTree, we get to see 4,000 more smiling faces as the school year begins," Speaker Morgan said. "I am encouraged by her efforts, by her determination and her commitment to ensuring the education of our Navajo children."

The backpacks come in five different colors: orange, blue, red, purple, green and pink. Each bag has two zippered front pockets and padded straps for comfort and support, the bags also include: a ruler, crayons, a glue stick, a pen, pencil, a pencil sharpener and an eraser.

Bags will continue to be distributed during the month of August by the TohNaneesDizi Boys and Girls Club, TCRHCC Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, the Navajo Office of Youth Development and the Navajo Department of Behavioral Health Services to various schools in Western Navajo.

