

Jeannette Sasmor – The Joy of my Favorite Christmas ministry

As we enter the New Year, I am still filled with the Joy of my favorite Christmas ministry... The Tewa Holiday Project. It is an annual event that allows us to realize our shared ministry with indigenous people, namely the Tewa people on First Mesa in Hopiland. It stands in my mind as a Wellness Project that provides food and warm clothes as a way of improving health and preventing illness. Begun in 2007 by Randy and Milton Crewse, two local Sedonans, who were bringing Christmas baskets to friends on the Hopi reservation, north of Winslow, AZ. I became a Tewa Traveler in 2010, when I made my first trip to First Mesa. It was an awesome experience to meet and socialize with this warm and welcoming group of people who do thier best to make the most of what they have. Some have lived on First Mesa all of their lives. Others have travelled away to school or other locations and have come back to their home on First Mesa.

The trek leaves Sedona on a Saturday in December at 7:30am and travels with pit stops at Little America in Flagstaff and the Flying J in Winslow. The last 60 miles north of Winslow pass through vast areas of open land, arriving at the Tewa Community Center at about 11am. This year we had the largest caravan of vehicles ever... 75 cars/trucks including several members of the St. Andrew's Faith Community... myself, Jim Hose, Ron Rummel, Dottie Koehler, Greg Noyes and Ree Hudson. Also, were members from the Sedona Lions Club, Randy and Milton Crewse, Bill and Pam Klauser, and Angel Schepp, this is where two of my life activities merge. In addition, there were travelers from as far away as California who regularly come back for the Tewa Holiday Project. Waiting for us patiently at the Community Center when we arrived were 90 Tewa elders who had been verified by the Community Coordinator.



*Tewa Community Center decorated for Holiday Project*



*Warm blanket waiting for distribution*



*Handmade hats for elders*



*2 bags each of nonperishable items*



*Fruit being repackaged for distribution*



*Huge bags of potatoes*



*Bags of carrots for pick-up*



*Turkeys in coolers for pick up*



*2 boxes each of dry goods*



*Volunteers waiting for distribution to start*

Once all the components of the distribution are in place, the Tewa elders are escorted into the area and matched with a group of volunteers who help them carry their goods to their cars. For any elders who are unable to come by in person, the Community Center staff deliver their share directly to their homes. It takes about an hour to an hour and a half to distribute all of the goods to the cars of the elders present.



*Volunteers are much appreciated for their help!*



*Resting in between helping to load*

Following the completion of loading all of the goodies for the elders, the ladies of the Tewa Village host groups of volunteers in their homes for a traditional Tewa luncheon. The exact choice of menu depends on the host family who work together to prepare and serve the food. It is a fantastic experience to be invited to share a home cooked meal with a Tewa family. And, the experience is one that I will never forget. Spending time with these wonderfully generous people and learning about their lives is certainly the high point of my holiday season. I always learn something new. I am looking forward next year!



If you would like to learn more about the Tewa Holiday project, you can find the full history at <http://tewaholidayproject.com/> . If you think you would like to participate in 2019, there is a link on that site as well or you can ask me about how to get involved.

Happy New Year, everyone! May 2019 be a healthy year for you and yours!

Jeannette L Sasmor, RNCE, FCN

Parish Nurse