

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation: A Lasting Legacy of Chumash Generosity

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians has been a generous contributor to the community since the beginning. Chumash ancestors even had a word for it, ‘amuyich,’ which means generosity in Samala, the Santa Ynez Chumash Native language.

In the early days, when the Santa Ynez Chumash tribe had not yet traveled very far on the road to economic stability, their ancestors were still generous with what they did have. “Many of our tribal members volunteered their time in the community,” said Vincent Armenta, Tribal Chairman of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. “Today, not only do tribal members continue to volunteer, but the tribe is now in a position to give back to the community.”

When the doors opened to the tribe’s gaming facility in 1994, it was an immediately popular destination that has resulted in success for the tribe, as well as significant economic benefits to the entire Santa Barbara County. For the past 16 years, the tribe has donated a percentage of their tribal gaming revenue to philanthropic endeavors.

Establishing the Foundation

In 2005, the tribe took an important step by establishing the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation. The formation of their Foundation provided the tribe with the opportunity to create a more structured philanthropic program for the tribe and, in turn, allow a format that made their program more accessible to a wider range of organizations.

“Our philanthropic approach relies on building strong partnerships and working hand-in-hand with community members and non-profit organizations to enhance our community,” said Veronica Sandoval, Foundation Administrator. “As such, we found that a more systematic approach to obtaining and reviewing requests actually helped us create a more collaborative approach to giving.”

Casting a Wide Net

The tribe’s Foundation places particular interest on activities and programs that expands the opportunities for the disadvantaged, protects the environment or enhances the lives of youth and seniors. With this in mind, the Foundation makes grants to vital community organizations with programs in those areas of interest.

“Every year the Foundation evaluates hundreds of grant applications from a variety of non-profit organizations in and out of Santa Barbara County,” said Sandoval. “Those that fit within our categories are presented to the Business Committee [the tribal government leadership team] for discussion and decisions.”



The Business Committee leads the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation. L-R: David Dominguez, Gary Pace, Chairman Vincent Armenta, Secretary/Treasurer Ken Kahn, Vice-Chairman Richard Gomez.

Sandoval noted that while some community foundations review no more than 100 grant requests per year, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians reviewed nearly 500 in the past nine months alone.

History and Collaboration

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation treats its grantees as valued community partners and has developed nurturing strategic partnerships with non-profit organizations in the community. There’s no better example of this than the People Helping People organization in Solvang.

“There was a time, long before our gaming operation, when some tribal members needed extra assistance with basic necessities,” said Sandoval. “The Santa Ynez Valley People Helping People organization, which is located in a town just minutes away from our reservation, was there for our tribal members during their times of need.”

Sandoval said that it warms her heart to know that the tribe can return the generosity that was so readily given to tribal members by People Helping People. “They have been there for all members of the community for the past 18 years and we are delighted that we are in the position to be there for them today,” Sandoval said.

Founded in 1992 by several local citizens and government officials who saw the need for a local non-profit organization to supply emergency and short-term social services, the organizers of People Helping People also had a larger vision for the organization. They foresaw the necessity to assist individuals and families extricate themselves from a cycle of poverty that required them to be dependent upon assistance. Therefore, included in their mission is the directive to empower individuals and families to become self-sufficient.

In 1994, People Helping People served 400 unduplicated clients – that is, clients counted one-time regardless of the number of services accessed – and operated from donated space in the Veteran’s Memorial Hall in Solvang. Since those humble beginnings, People Helping People has purchased a building to house the many programs currently available to the community. They now have 25 full-time employees in seven locations and 17 direct service programs. In 2008-09, some 3,600 unduplicated clients were served.

“We have grown and evolved alongside People Helping People and have supported and collaborated with them over the years on their programs,” said Sandoval. “It’s this type of relationship that benefits the entire community.”

Community Involvement

In addition to funding grants through the Foundation, the tribe is also heavily involved in the community in other ways. Each year they host a fundraising concert for the Central Coast Toys for Tots organization, bringing in country western acts and donating the proceeds to this worthy non-profit. The



The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians is a long-time supporter of the Ventura County Food Share’s efforts to provide food for the hungry.

average gift each year is \$25,000.

The tribe also donates hundreds of cases of bottled water for local events and provides gift certificates to their restaurants and hotels for auction items at fundraisers.

“Our employees, management and tribal leadership are involved in the community in many ways,” said Sandoval. “From volunteering at events to sitting on boards and participating in the fundraisers, everyone has a role that they take seriously.”



The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians cares deeply about the community and its youth. That’s why tribal membership made a decision to pledge a \$3 million commitment to help refurbish the Santa Ynez High School’s athletic field.

Chumash Classic Golf Tournament

Perhaps one of the most visible ways that the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians demonstrates its commitment to the community is through its annual Chumash Classic Golf Tournament. The tribe just recently held its sixth annual tournament and raised \$113,000 for two local charities: United Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Barbara County and Stuart C. Gildred Family YMCA.

“We are proud to partner with these organizations,” said Chairman Armenta. “Both play a significant role in ensuring that our community is a better place.”

Proceeds from the previous tournaments totaled an annual average of \$100,000. “Our tournament has become more popular every year,” said Richard Gomez, Tribal Vice Chairman. “Our goal is to not only raise money for worthy causes, but to make the fundraiser unique and special. Participants look forward to the Chumash Classic Golf Tournament and each year we have a full field of 144 players.”

Community Pride

While the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation is at the core of the tribe’s community activity, they further solidify their commitment by volunteerism, participating in fundraisers and hosting their own fundraisers for various worthy causes.

“We have taken our success with our gaming facility and turned it into success for the entire community by reinvesting our revenue in programs the help ensure that the Santa Ynez Valley continues to be a great place to live and work,” said Chairman Armenta.

To date, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians has donated more than \$13 million to non-profits, schools and other organizations that work to create a better community. ♣

For more information about the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, visit www.santaynezchumash.org.