

ThinkFirst Navajo aids Winslow High class’s car-seat drive

BY CINDY YURTH
NAVAJO TIMES

WINDOW ROCK — The Winslow High Class of 1964’s effort to collect 100 infant car seats to be distributed to Navajo expectant mothers got a huge boost last month when a nonprofit dedicated to accident prevention on the Navajo Nation stepped in to help.

In just a few weeks, the number of collected car seats went from 18 to 68, boosting Navajo Newborns Need Safety Seats to 65 percent of its goal.

“Barbara’s involvement changed everything,” said Jerry Sanchez, organizer of NNNSS and the class’s upcoming 55th reunion. “We had the drive, but we needed someone who knew what they were doing.”

Barbara Crowell Roy, founder of Eve’s Fund for Native American Health Initiatives, which bankrolls the accident prevention program ThinkFirst Navajo, said she was happy to help.

She commended Sanchez for his commitment and his efforts so far.

“In spite of the challenges of trying to deal with bureaucracy on the Navajo Nation, Jerry was successful in getting 18 new car seats donated (and) distributed to 18 expectant mothers who were carefully instructed on installation and use,” Roy said.

But with her years of experience running a nonprofit, Roy could immediately see some things NNNSS could be doing better.

While Sanchez had pretty much circumvented the bureaucracy, Roy and ThinkFirst Navajo Director JoDee Dennison decided to enlist its help.

Starting with the Navajo Nation’s first and second ladies, who enthusiastically hopped on board, they then met with the Indian Health Service’s Office of Environmental Health Injury Prevention Program, who encouraged them to reach out to the Navajo Department of Transportation’s Highway Safety Division.

“From there, a collaborative partnership was created,” Roy said.

Since Eve’s Fund already has nonprofit status and an excellent reputation, it launched its own initiative, Buckle Up Navajo Newborns, essentially with the same mission as NNNSS. A birthday fundraiser Roy

created for her Facebook page raised \$1,500.

Roy also found NNNSS’s MO a bit clunky. Sanchez had asked donors to order a certain car seat online from Walmart and have it shipped to The Falcon Restaurant in Winslow, where it would be held until local health professionals could identify a recipient.

Roy thought it would be easier for donors to just send however much money they could, and Buckle Up would purchase the seats.

She was able to get a wholesale deal from a car seat company, and went with a different seat — one that works for a child up to 65 pounds, so parents wouldn’t have to keep buying new seats as their child grows.

Dennison added the caveat that the mothers who receive the car seats must be trained by certified trainers, noting that up to 75 percent of car seats are not properly installed.

That’s where the Navajo Department of Highway Safety comes in.

“The Navajo Department of Highway Safety is proud to partner with Eve’s Fund and its ThinkFirst Navajo program along with the Winslow Class of ’64 on acquiring much-needed child restraints to be distributed to children throughout the Navajo Nation,” said its program manager, Norma Bowman.

“Our department provides the necessary educational resource to ensure that children are properly restrained and receive hands-on instruction for the various stages of their child restraint use,” she said.

While Roy isn’t promising to have another 32 car seats in hand in time for the Class of 64’s Aug. 9 reunion, she thinks the program is a good enough idea that it needs to keep going.

Buckle Up’s goal will be 100 car seats a year. She plans to enlist corporate sponsors in addition to individuals to keep the momentum going.

Bowman couldn’t be happier.

“It is a huge benefit to Navajo children when organizations such as these reach out to assist our traffic safety efforts on Navajo,” she said.

To make a donation to Buckle Up Navajo Newborns, visit Eve’s Fund Donation page at:

<https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/evesfund-thinkfirstnavajo>



COURTESY PHOTO
Car seats like this one are being collected by ThinkFirst Navajo's Buckle Up Navajo Newborns program and distributed, with proper training, to expectant mothers. The program is an offshoot of Winslow High's Class of 1964's Navajo Newborns Need Safety Seats.