

## NIGA Associate Members Assist with the White Earth Mission Trip



Robert Durant, tribal council member of the White Earth Tribe, together with his daughter and two high school members from St. Luke's Church of Darien, Conn., finish the roof on Earl's home.



Earl gives Valarie a big hug of gratitude.

During the last week of June 2011, a group of volunteers, including several National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) associate members, traveled to Cass Lake, Minn., to assist White Earth Ojibwe Tribal enrollees with housing repairs/ construction and medical assistance and the community at large with elders' and children's projects. The people served were tribal members living in the rural region of northern Minnesota, where unemployment exceeds 60 percent, winter temperatures reach approximately 50 degrees below zero and there is a general need for all basic services.

The White Earth Cass Lake Mission Trip was originally founded and organized by my family and companies (the Red-Horse/Mohl family; Red-Horse Financial Group and Red-Horse Native Productions), working alongside the Bel Air Presbyterian church. Five years ago, we launched a very "gut reaction" effort when we saw the needs and answered a request for help from the White Earth Family Office located in Cass Lake. Paula Valiant, director of the White Earth Family Office, tries to meet the needs of White Earth enrollees who live in the Cass Lake area but are outside their own service district so typically cannot access basic services. The needs have become so great over the years that the tiny office located on Main Street is overwhelmed. When I saw my own tithes to my church serving good causes all over the world, places like India and China, yet saw the great needs here stateside, something definitely tugged at my heart and pocketbook and I just reacted. Initially we were very unorganized and I called it "guerilla" mission work—just helping where we could and not having much infrastructure or organization. The first year though, we still effectively saved a few families from the winter's harsh elements as we replaced one entire roof and repaired several other serious home essentials. Since then, as other people and firms heard about the needs and our efforts, we have been truly blessed by an incredible expansion of assistance, and the program has evolved to a fairly well-organized effort with a large group of volunteers and donors with projects that include construction, health care, summer camp for tribal youth and elder programs.

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The 2011 mission trip was a big success despite being hit with thunderstorms and rain for much of the week. Construction projects this year included the complete reconstruction of a severely damaged roof for an 86-year-old tribal member who is a World War II veteran, having participated in the D-Day invasion. Earl was so appreciative and sweet and kept thanking everyone on the mission team. He even came to the closing night dinner and gave every single participant thank you notes. We also completed a window retrofit and paint job for an elderly woman, as well as a skirting job on a trailer whose pipes were exposed and kept freezing in the winter. The children's program seemed larger than ever with more than 40 children participating in games, sports and VBS activities each day. Two volunteer nurses assisted with medical check-ups for some of the local school age children and another volunteer team visited elders and presented them with gift bags filled with donated items. Associate member volunteers on this year's construction crew included Matthew Robinson (KlasRobinson Q.E.D.), Brian Fagerstrom (WorthGroup), Curt Mohl and Derek Mohl (Red-Horse Financial Group) and Dave Sprangers (Sprangers Construction).

Past and present support hails from throughout Indian country and the gaming industry as well as from churches and individuals nationwide. A big expression of gratitude is owed to all of the donors both past and present, including the National Indian Gaming Association, Ernie Stevens Jr., St. Luke's Church of Darien, Conn., the Steve Whalen family, **COST of Wisconsin**, the Richard Steinhaus family, the Palace Casino, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, White Earth Band of Ojibwe, Shooting Star Casino, Ron and Paula Valiant, Sprangers Construction, WorthGroup, KlasRobinson Q.E.D., the Red-Horse/Mohl family, Stephen Armstrong, Randy Tyler, Ellen Sletten, Dr. Bob Drosman, Janine Bender, Bill Haas, the Turner family, Cindy Walhof, Arizona Indian Gaming Association, Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, Downstream Casino, WalshBishop Architects, Wells Fargo, Buss Productions, Moen Faucets, Lexington Design, Hope Baptist Church, Knox Presbyterian Church, Mary Beth DeFazio, Bel Air Presbyterian Church, Gae Veit, John and Enya Adsit, Asheley Farmer/Dennis Needleman, Joselyn Wesler, Kent E. Richey and Judy Lazzari-Ripley.

The 2012 trip is already being planned, although we collectively feel it needs to be moved later in the summer, since June is the wettest month of the year in Minnesota as we found out! We welcome any interested volunteers, especially those with expertise in construction, medicine or teaching. For more information, please contact me at [valerier\[at\]valerieredhorse.com](mailto:valerier[at]valerieredhorse.com).

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