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FEATURED

Lapwai family answers the call for help

Micah Bisbee and her family have organized an effort to provide Nez Perce Reservation residents with supplies during the pandemic

By Kerri Sandaine, of the Tribune
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Michael Bisbee Jr. (left) along with his daughters, Micah (left-center), 21, Memphis (center), 6, Madden (right-center), 12, and wife, Roberta Jose-Bisbee, pack up food, toiletries, cleaning supplies and over-the-counter medicine for a family of four at the Nimiipuu Help Base in the front yard of their Lapwai home on Monday afternoon.

Pete Caster/Tribune

LAPWAI — Micah Bisbee is grateful for the way her community quickly rallied to help people and pets affected by the coronavirus.

When COVID-19 cases began surging on the Nez Perce Reservation, Bisbee and other members of her family developed a volunteer network and began collecting donations to assist folks who were in a quandary or quarantined because of the pandemic.

“It all happened so fast,” said the 21-year-old member of the Nez Perce Tribe. “Everyone was kind of panicking at first. I had just finished school in Montana and wanted to help. Our people were struggling, and they needed food. I came up with an idea, and my mom took the idea and ran with it. She has been so amazing in our community with helping people.”

Bisbee’s mother, Roberta Jose-Bisbee, is executive director of Nimiipuu Health in Lapwai. She has been on the front line at work and home, where a makeshift supply tent now stands in her front yard.

When someone from the reservation reaches out, the volunteers fill the orders and make deliveries, with the help of community support.

“Donations and volunteers started pouring in,” Bisbee said. “We’ve had an awesome response and pretty much became a nonprofit organization right away. Everyone loved the idea so much. We don’t do it for recognition or anything like that. We do this to help our people, because we’ve always been taught to give and not take.”

Bisbee has been working in the pharmacy department at the medical clinic for the past two months, and recently moved to Lewiston. She plans to return to school to obtain a master’s degree now that she’s earned her bachelor’s degree in social science from University of Montana Western in Dillon.

In the meantime, she’s monitoring needs on the Nimiipuu Help Base COVID-19 Facebook page. Food, cleaning supplies, pet resources and other essential items are being delivered across the reservation.

In the past two weeks or so, they’ve assisted numerous families with the help of 20-plus volunteers. Bisbee estimates more than \$5,000 has been raised to keep the shelves stocked.

“It’s kind of crazy how big it got,” Bisbee said. “Since my town is so small, when you find out someone has COVID, you know them and hope they are OK. Whoever gets it, we are thinking of them and planning on how we will help them.”

The best way to reach the organization is through a message to its Facebook page, Bisbee said. Donations are being accepted and an account has been set up to keep the money separate.

“All of this could not have been possible without monetary donations, food and home essential items donated by community members, businesses and several tribal organizations. We’ve been able to serve 76 families in Lapwai and Kamiah with donations from more than 90 community members,” she said.

“We are very thankful to have been raised and encouraged to support one another and help each other, especially through these difficult times. We would also like to thank our traditional gatherers for our mountain tea and kous kous. This part is very important because that is who we are.”

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