

## Team Chumash members exemplify service

Vincent Armenta Commentary | Posted: Thursday, May 12, 2011 12:00 am

Our tribe's connection to the community is strong, historical and ongoing. Long before we began operating our successful business enterprises, our tribal members were volunteers at the many local nonprofits in our community.

Once we opened our Chumash Casino Resort, we began donating to a variety of community charities. Through our Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation and our annual Chumash Classic Charity Golf Tournament, we have donated more than \$14 million.

Our employees have also been strong advocates of being involved in their community and have volunteered for numerous events and activities. Organized through our foundation, "Team Chumash" is composed of hundreds of employees and their families.

The vision of Team Chumash is to create a structured program designed to provide team members opportunities to volunteer for nonprofit organizations that are partnered with our foundation.

So far this year, more than 650 Team Chumash volunteer hours have been logged in as team volunteers participated in a number of community events. Two recent events include the Junior Blind Olympics and the Solvang Relay for Life.

Each year, Junior Blind and the Optimist Blind Youth Association host the Junior Blind Olympics, the premier sporting event for athletes from across the Western United States who are blind and visually impaired.

The event allows access for all youth, despite their disabilities, to participate in challenging, fun and confidence-building activities. Competition includes shot put, archery, rowing, soccer throw, goal ball, rock wall climbing, running long jump and 50-yard dash.

This year marks the third time our foundation sponsored the event and participated with volunteers. In all, 30 volunteers were recruited to serve as team coaches for visually impaired athletes, as time and score keepers, and as personal guides.

Although Team Chumash volunteers contributed their time to the Junior Blind Olympics, many of them walked away feeling as if they were the ones who benefited. Team members used words such as "inspiring," "motivating" and "moving" to describe their experience at the event.

The American Cancer Society's Relay For Life is a life-changing event that gives everyone in communities across the globe a chance to celebrate the lives of people who have battled cancer, remember loved ones lost, and fight back against the disease.

At the relay, teams of people camp out at a local high school, park or fairground and take turns walking or running around a track or path. Each team is asked to have a representative on the track at all times during the event. Because cancer never sleeps, relays are overnight events, usually for 24 hours.

This was the first time in three years that the Relay For Life was held in the Santa Ynez Valley. The event, which took place at Solvang Park at Mission Drive and First Street, was a huge success, raising over \$40,000.

Our foundation sponsored four Relay For Life teams. They were in charge of recruiting walkers and setting up the campsite at Solvang Park.

Team Chumash is all set to volunteer at a few upcoming events as well, including the Wine Country Bike Trek, a benefit for People Helping People; the FCA All Star Football Classic; and at the Solvang Senior Center.

We are extremely proud of the strong spirit of volunteerism that embodies every member of Team Chumash. They are dedicated, generous with their time and a perfect example of the legacy of giving that is part of our Chumash tradition.

Vincent Armenta is the tribal chairman of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians.