

# Tribes give to Katrina relief

## Two groups will donate \$1 million for houses for hurricane victims

**By Art Campos -- Bee Staff Writer**

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Two local American Indian tribes are donating a combined \$1 million for hurricane relief efforts.

Leaders for the United Auburn Indian Community in Placer County and the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians in Yolo County are scheduled today to donate \$500,000 each to Habitat for Humanity.

The organization is building homes around the clock for five days in New York's Rockefeller Plaza to house families displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

"We are doing something that is heartfelt," said Jessica Tavares, tribal chairwoman for the United Auburn Indian Community, the owners and operators of Thunder Valley Casino near Lincoln.

Tavares and Paula Lorenzo, who chairs the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians, are scheduled to hand over the check on NBC's "Today" show between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. The Rumsey Band owns and operates Cache Creek Casino Resort.

The two tribal leaders say they are in position to make sizable donations because of the success of their gambling casinos.

Tavares said the tribes were moved by the plight of people left homeless by the recent hurricanes in the Gulf Coast.

"It was just a couple of years ago that our members didn't have adequate housing," she said. "We didn't really have anything. But with the success of our casinos, we are now in position to help others - and we want to help now."

In a press statement, Lorenzo called Hurricane Katrina "the worst natural disaster ever to take place on our soil."

"We are deeply saddened by the destruction and loss of life in Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida and Alabama and we want to do our part to help these great states," she said. The Auburn and Rumsey tribes combined last year to donate \$1 million to victims of the tsunamis in Southeast Asia, said Doug Elmets, a spokesman for the tribes.

Half the amount was given to Habitat for Humanity and the other half went to a Save the Children relief fund, he said.

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and the tribes saw on television the homes being built outside the NBC studio in Rockefeller Plaza, they decided to make another contribution, Elmets said.

"We thought, 'Why not make an attempt to contribute to Habitat on the air to highlight the effort of these two tribes and inspire other organizations to do the same?' " Elmets said.

The spokesman said both tribes have established their generosity in philanthropic endeavors.

"The Rumsey Band has contributed a total of \$7 million to local charities and organizations and to disaster relief efforts over the past five years," Elmets said. "And the United Auburn Indian Community has given \$3.5 million in relief aid and to organizations in Placer County in its short two years of existence."

Elmets said the Auburn and Rumsey tribes "are undeniably the largest philanthropic givers in the Sacramento region."

Exact earnings by the two casinos are not revealed. However, based on earnings reports by Station Casinos, the company that operates Thunder Valley for the Auburn tribe, the casino stood to net more than \$300 million in 2003, its first year of operation.

Industry analysts said the figure, if accurate, would have made Thunder Valley one of the most lucrative casinos in the country, possibly trailing only two Indian casinos in Connecticut and the Bellagio casino in Las Vegas.

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## **What is Habitat for Humanity?**

Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit, ecumenical housing ministry that seeks to eliminate homelessness and substandard housing from the world. People of all backgrounds, races and religions are invited to build houses together in partnership with families in need.

Habitat has built more than 175,000 houses around the world.