COVID Grant for Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit

Drivers performed their pre-trip checklist and post-trip tasks; checking the oil, tires, handicap lifts and looking for any dents or dings on the vehicles.

Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit is a symbol of reliability and safety in the communities of Safford, Bylas, San Carlos, Globe and everywhere in between. Their use of modern technology is unlike anything used on the San Carlos Apache Reservation before.

As news of COVID-19 infections began to spread worldwide, the Nnee Bich'o Nii Transit Team prepared for the coming battle. They increased the number of times the drivers sanitized the buses while on their routes. At the end of the day, they used hospital-grade foggers to destroy any germs that might have been in

hard to reach areas. They had a plan to continue providing services to the people and to do their best to keep everyone as safe as possible.

On Saturday, March 14, 2020, the San Carlos Apache Tribal Council called a State of Emergency across the reservation. Tribal employees were given administrative leave and instructed to work from home, if possible. Friday, March 13, 2020, was the last day Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit provided their public transportation routes and services for the students attending the San Carlos Training Institute. They continued to provide transportation for employees of Apache Gold and Apache Sky casinos until the Tribe ordered both casinos closed on Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 5 p.m. The buses ran once more on Friday, March 20, 2020 for casino employees to assist with cleaning both facilities. On Wednesday, March 25, 2020, seven Apache Transit employees sanitized and completed safety sweeps of the fleet with plans to perform this task every two weeks throughout the State of Emergency shutdown.

The Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit Team reported for duty on Thursday, April 9, 2020 to perform routine maintenance on their fleet of eight buses and 14 vans. Drivers, Tina Harney, Brian James, Levi Elgo and John Smith arrived, bright eyed and bushy tailed, to do their pre- and post-trip tasks; checking the oil, tires, handicap lifts and looking for any dents or dings on the vehicles. Angelo Belvado, Lead Dispatcher and jack-of-all-trades supervised the event, giving instructions on what needed to be done. They were all happy to be back to work, even if it was only for a few hours. The drivers shared stories of their regular passengers expressing how much they missed the services provided by Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit.

The drivers performed their pre-trip checklist, then turned the key to start the vehicle. Several of the batteries needed a jump start but the others started without a problem. The most exciting part was when the vehicles left the Cutter Substation for a short trip to wake up the engines. The site of an Apache Transit bus on the roadways was a sign that the community will overcome this virus.

Bernadette Kniffin, Nnee Bich'o Nii Director, arrived after all vehicles were taken out for a short trip. She gave an update on recent events regarding Apache Transit.

Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit is funded in part by Federal Transit Authority (FTA) Section 5311(c) programs. On Thursday, April 2, 2020, the FTA announced a $25 billion package to help the nation's public transportation system. $30 million of that amount was allocated to Tribal Transportation Programs. The San Carlos Apache Tribe was awarded $600,264, the seventh highest amount of the 133 Tribes that applied for the grant. This grant amount is 100 percent federally funded with no local match required. The San Carlos Apache Tribal Council passed a resolution accepting the grant on Tuesday, April 7, 2020. The funds will be used to maintain the fleet and cover employee salaries during the shutdown.

The Nnee Bich'o Nii Apache Transit Team would like to let the community know that they miss their passengers, as well, and will be back in full force when the crisis has passed. In the meantime, they want to remind everyone to follow the Council's recommendations.