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## Cheyenne celebration remembers woman

By MIKE STARK Of The Gazette Staff

It would've taken a lot more than single-digit temperatures to dampen the holiday spirit in Lame Deer on Sunday.

About 800 people showed up at the Charging Horse Casino to eat together, celebrate, catch a glimpse of Santa Claus and give gifts to the community's children.

Phillip Whiteman Jr., one of the organizers, said the event was named after his mother, Florence Whiteman, the last original Cheyenne warrior woman of the Elk Scraper Warrior Society, a society responsible for tribal ceremonies.

"The Cheyenne people in the past and the present, we have to deal with a lot of adversity but one of our cultural traditions is to give, not 'gimme,'" Whiteman said Sunday night. "That's what my mother represented."

Two representatives from Conscious Alliance drove up from Boulder, Colo., for the event and delivered toys for about 400 kids, according to Justin Baker, one of the group's members.

Conscious Alliance is a nonprofit that organizes food and toy drives at music festivals and sporting events. The proceeds benefit food pantries and American Indian reservations, according to the group's Web site.

The group plans on delivering "a couple hundred" turkeys to the Northern Cheyenne reservation later today.

Santa's arrival was one of the Sunday's highlights. Adults and kids bundled up against the cold in anticipation.

"You can't top it when Santa walks in," Whiteman said. "They went nuts."

Presents were handed out to those in kindergarten through third grade. Candy and other treats were given out to other kids.

Whiteman, a Northern Cheyenne storyteller, won the top prize in the spoken word category at the Indian Summer Music Awards earlier this year. That event and others reminded him of the blessings he and others have to thankful for.

Sunday's gathering was a chance to celebrate not only Christmas but to come together as a people and remember the values that bind them together.

"It's that time of year to think about one common goal, and that's to be able to give," Whiteman said. "To me, that's really powerful."

The event could become an annual one and Conscious Alliance representatives said they'd return next year.