

Gallup's TA travel stop shows customers some love

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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TravelCenters of America holds a fun and music-filled day for truckers and customers

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Like all of us who have traveled the highways and byways, pit stops are a much-welcomed relief, especially at places where the reception is warm. One pit stop that really shows its appreciation for its drivers and customers is TravelCenters of America at the west end of Gallup.

Sept. 22 was the Drivers/Customers Appreciation Day at the Gallup TA, located at 3404 West Highway 66 and Interstate 40. The event, held at the truck stop, was filled with fun and games, free fruit and water, and a live country band playing for the crowd. Special food-menu items were served outside, including Navajo tacos, a double patty Navajo burger and frybread.

The annual appreciation day was welcomed with interest from locals and tourists alike as they participated in its various activities.

Despite a rough start in the morning, the event went off without a hitch, TA General Manager Thomacita Nez said.

Nez made sure everything ran smoothly, and prepared the goodies for the crowd. With the company for over 13 years, Nez said it makes her feel good to do this for the drivers and customers.

"It's something we do for the drivers and customers every year, where we appreciate them," she said. "This has been going on for a quite a while ever since I can remember. It makes me feel good when you see customers and drivers come through and they're happy at what we're doing. We've had customers who have been coming in for the past five or 10 years where we know them by name."

Nez said just having the customers acknowledge what TA is doing makes it all worthwhile. The travel center comprises a restaurant, truck stop, convenience store and hotel. All this may seem like a lot of work, but Nez said her workers and volunteers help make it possible.

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"It's mainly for the drivers that keep our company running, so it's appreciation for them and I couldn't have done it without my volunteers for coming out and helping us," Nez said.

Among those helping with the event was TA Acting General Manager Cassie Spencer.

Although, it may seem like a lot of work, Spencer said, it's a lot fun, especially when working with fellow co-workers. Customers have thought the workers were brothers and sisters because they work well together and are close to one another.

All in all, the workers pulled out an awesome appreciation day, Spencer said.

"I think it came out pretty good, we had quite bit of people out there having fun," she said. "In fact they were dancing and having fun. It's funny how a lot of people think we're related, but we're not [laughing], we're just coworkers and it's just a pretty good place to work."

The big draw to this year's appreciation day was a live country band playing for the crowd. The band "Full Country" is from Tohatchi and this was their first time playing for an event of this caliber.

Daryl Kinsel, lead vocals for the band, said it was fun to play and do their part for the event.

The band consists entirely of family members who have been playing together for over 20 years.

"We wanted to give back to the community and we love playing for everybody," he said. "The kids, the adults and all of us just came out to just have a good time."

The band was formed in 1998 by the group's father, who's played in various bands for over 50

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years, and Kinsel said they followed in his footsteps and formed the band.

"It's been a good journey for the band and we love what we do and playing here today shows it," he said.

Professional truck drivers Keith and Theresa Yates of Granby, Miss., said they thoroughly enjoyed the band and the event. Both said this was the first TA center they've seen do this, and it made them feel welcomed. Having dropped off one their truck loads, the couple and their dog Taz made a pit stop and enjoyed the festivities.

"It was good, and I enjoyed the music, and everyone was so friendly, it was really nice for the drivers to be appreciated at this store," Keith Yates said. "This is the first one that has done it for the professional drivers; it makes me feel proud, put it that way, and I enjoyed it."

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