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Tribe pays Grizzlies \$1m fee

But check ceremony is haunted by struggles.

By George Hostetter
The Fresno Bee

Reassurance was the name of the game as top officials of the Fresno Grizzlies and the Chukchansi tribe met on Friday to exchange a hefty check.

But it was hard not to sense the widespread instability at the root of the brief event at Chukchansi Park.

Grizzlies President Chris Cummings and Nancy Ayala, council chairwoman of the Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians, held a ceremonial check signifying the tribe's full payment of this year's naming-rights fee at the downtown stadium.

The check was symbolic — the tribe covered the \$1 million bill with two separate payments about a month ago.

Ayala said the tribe considers it "an honor" to do business with the Grizzlies and the community. Cummings said the team is

"looking forward to keeping this relationship going as long as baseball exists."

The back story, though, isn't quite as cheery.

The tribe, which operates the Chukchansi Gold Resort & Casino near Coarsegold, is in the middle of a bitter internal fight for political control. The tribe usually pays its stadium naming-rights fee with a single check in September.

But, tribal spokesman David Leibowitz said, "the political struggle has woven its way into a

set of economic difficulties."

Tribal leaders, Leibowitz said, "continue to push forward."

As if a civil war weren't enough, the tribe also is worried about even more competition in a regional Indian gaming industry in which location has always been paramount.

The North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians wants to build a casino with 2,000 slot machines and 40 gaming tables on 305 acres along Highway 99 north of Mad- See **GRIZZLIES**, Page A6

Citrus growers fight the freeze

Ag officials will inspect fruit as temps hit 20s.

By Robert Rodriguez
The Fresno Bee

As San Joaquin Valley citrus farmers continue their battle against subfreezing temperatures, county agriculture officials began pulling samples Friday — a first step toward stopping bad fruit from reaching the marketplace.

Temperatures around the Valley's citrus belt dropped to dangerous levels for the third day in a row Friday morning. Lows around the Valley included 24 degrees in east Clovis, 22 degrees in Fowler and 25 degrees in Lindsay — approaching record lows for the date in the region.

Another round of icy weather was expected today, Sunday and Monday. The forecast for this morning was a mix of rain and snow on the Valley floor before 10 a.m. — but little to no snow accumulation, said Jim Andersen, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service. The threat of showers was expected to decrease toward the afternoon.

The high temperature for Fresno was forecast to be 45. To help fight the cold, growers continued to use wind machines, helicopters and irrigation water to protect the Valley's \$1.5 billion citrus crop from serious harm.

California citrus industry officials say, so far, minimal damage is expected to the navel and lemon crop, but mandarins are a concern.

The thin-skinned mandarins are more susceptible to freezing temperatures. In some mandarin growing areas, the thermometer dropped to the low 20s early Friday.

"We may see more damage in mandarins. We just don't know how much," said Bob Blakely, director of industry relations for California Citrus Mutual.

Blakely said it could be several weeks before growers and industry officials have a good grasp on how much of a blow this cold blast is to the citrus

See **FREEZE**, Page A2

Doing for others (and themselves)

FOWLER TEENS BRING HOLIDAY CHEER TO SICK KIDS



PHOTOS BY JOHN WALKER/THE FRESNO BEE

Fowler High student Isaac Escamilla gives an early Christmas present Friday to 11-year-old Juan Carlos, a patient at Children's Hospital Central California, as other members of the school's Redcat Men's Alliance — from left, Jonathan Gutierrez, Jason Acevedo and Gabriel Lara — stand by.

By Hannah Furfaro
The Fresno Bee

Teens from Fowler High School dressed up in navy blazers and red-striped ties carried Christmas packages Friday afternoon from room to room in the children's oncology unit at Children's Hospital Central California.

Sophomore Gabriel Rodriguez, 15, led the way carrying an oversized Christmas card as another student handed a brightly wrapped gift to 11-year-old Juan Carlos, who's being treated for stage four lymphoma.

"It's nice to be back," said Gabriel, who remembers visiting the hospital when his sister was diagnosed with dia-

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betes. "I've seen kids with different (medical conditions), and it's nice knowing they have smiles on their faces."

Gabriel and the group of more than 20 teenagers from Fowler are part of Redcat Men's Alliance, a class for at-risk boys that aims to give them leadership skills and ways to give back to the community. They have a dress code — khakis, ties and sport coats — and are getting extra mentoring from teachers to help them succeed.

The program, which started this year, See **DONATIONS**, Page A2

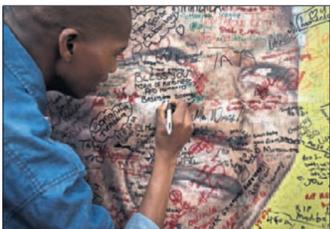


Fowler High student Gabriel Rodriguez talks with Children's Hospital Central California patient Haylee Cervantes, 5, who is happy with the doll she received from him.

Mandela's mourners sing, dance in streets of S. Africa

A well-wisher writes a message on a poster of Nelson Mandela on which others have written their messages of condolence and support Friday in Soweto, South Africa.

ASSOCIATED PRESS



By Nicholas Kulish, Lydia Polgreen and Alan Cowell
The New York Times

SOWETO, South Africa — The mood was more festive than funeral. Outside Nelson Mandela's former home in Soweto on Friday, crowds sang, chanted and danced. People carried posters emblazoned with his famous quotations. Children ran through the streets, hold-

ing up pictures of the former president's face torn from the morning's newspapers.

"We love you, Papa Mandela," they cried.

Eunice Ngakane, 40, from North West province, said she and her friends were going to spend the whole night on Vilakazi Street, remembering the national hero who had died the night before. Then they would "freshen up" in the

morning and come right back. "When Africa cries, Africa sings," said Japie Molatedi, 55, who described himself as a "typical Sowetan."

Samantha Nkabinde, 28, a financial analyst in Johannesburg, said it was only fitting for the mourning to take place in such a public fashion.

See **MANDELA**, Page A12

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INDEX

BusinessB9
ClassifiedD1
Fun & GamesC6
HoroscopeC8
LocalA3
Nation & WorldA8
ObituariesA9
SportsA10
StateA7
TelevisionC8

CHATTER BOX

Rare tiger at Fresno Chaffee Zoo is pregnant

The pitter-patter of tiny tiger cub paws may soon be heard at Fresno Chaffee Zoo, because Mek, a rare Malayan tiger who had a litter about three years ago at the San Diego Zoo, is expecting. **Page A3**

Online: Stay current with the latest Fresno State athletic news at fresnobee.com/bulldogs

Valley to mark Pearl Harbor

The central San Joaquin Valley once had 150 Pearl Harbor survivors. Now only a handful remain to tell others about their experience on that historic day 72 years ago. **Page A3**



TODAY'S FORECAST

Chance of showers
High 43
Low 25

Wood-burning restrictions, B10
AQI: Good, 50
Details: Weather, B10
Online: fresnobee.com/weather

