

GIFT:

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tell you how helpful it's been," he said.

The Christmas Express distributes food, toys and other items to needy families during the holiday season. Engle said she started making quilts for the program about 12 years ago, and eventually got a handful of fellow residents at Desert Sage Manor to help tie the ones she made, and in some cases make their

own. Together they donate between 100 and 120 handmade quilts each year.

Community members often donate fabric for the quilts, but the women generally pay for batting and other supplies out of their own pockets.

Engle said she started making quilts after she retired "just for something to do," but now she loves being able to help out a worthy cause.

This year she said she made most of the fronts and then set them up

on frames in the common area so other people could sit and help tie together the front and the back. Fellow Desert Sage Manor resident Geri Nunenkamp said having the quilts to work on during the year had been helpful in keeping her mind off of her health issues.

"It's fun," she said. "When you're in pain and you can't sleep, you can sit and think of something else."

In addition to the quilts, the residents also help the

Christmas Express program by collecting donations, crocheting items and buying toys and books to donate.

Darlene Nelson, property manager for Desert Sage Manor, pointed out that the apartments — which are available to women age 62 and older — are subsidized by the housing authority. She said many of the women there feel drawn toward doing something in recognition of the rent help they receive.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

Bonnie Engle stands with some of the quilts that she and other Desert Sage Manor residents have prepared to donate to the Christmas Express.

SOCCER:

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org it jumped to 34 percent for 2014-15.

De La Cruz knew that BMCC's Latino student population was at just 21 percent in the fall of 2014, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, and a self-reported 23.3 percent according to BMCC's internal Office of Institutional Research. He also knew that Latino athletes who want to continue in sports can't attend local colleges because they can't play their desired sport, often soccer. De La Cruz's fiancée has a son, Fabian Cortez, who graduated from Hermiston High last spring and enrolled at Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario, partially because TVCC has a successful program, but also because that was as close as he could go and also play soccer.

De La Cruz sought to change that. He wanted BMCC to open its arms to the Latino community.

What he didn't know, though, was that Preus and BMCC were already "investigating the possibility" of bringing a soccer program to BMCC. So when De La Cruz came with the idea, it was all but settled then.

"We were like, 'Right on, man. Let's do this,'" Preus said. "So his support really helped spur us to move a little faster than we might have (otherwise)."

"To me, that means a lot because we all have a right to get a good education, and BMCC is being very open to ideas," De La Cruz added. "The Latino community is very excited."

De La Cruz, Preus and BMCC are using soccer as a mechanism to help the Latino community. De La Cruz said that many are simply ignorant of the resources offered to help offset tuition costs. The story is the same every time, he said. A child comes home with interest in or an offer to or information about playing soccer collegiately, and the parents see

the five-sometimes six-digit cost and tell their child they can't afford it. They don't know how to have tuition funds supplemented by the state or federal government, or even that schools will offer to pay for a portion of the costs with scholarships.

In this way, De La Cruz hopes to use soccer — and athletics as a whole — to motivate young people to find something constructive to do, build a moral system, get an education, and eventually give back to the community. And BMCC's move to include soccer in a county with the demographics as they are was an acknowledgment to De La Cruz and others that BMCC saw the same thing and acted accordingly.

"That's the starting point right there," he said. "You do this recommendation, you'll see the end result. And then, the other recommendations will come later. Later, I'll recommend we need more Latino instructors."

"Soccer is the first one that they can see (if) it works. It will work."

But in addition to providing the Latino community with resources they deserve yet know not about, De La Cruz has a larger, more general mission. He sees a community in Hermiston that is divided, in a sense. And these two groups' choice of sport is as telling evidence as there is.

He wants to use soccer as a unifier, to bring people together. We're all from Hermiston, he says, and we should be united in that fact. Soccer can be that tool.

"Our goal as HAC chairman and HAC committees, we're the bridge to both communities to unite them together," he said, adding that his son married a white woman, so his family is fluent in trans-culture dealings. He also pointed out that though most of the high school soccer teams are either predominately or heavily Latino, white players do appear on the rosters. To him, that's an indication of the growth of soccer and

its potential as a community unifier.

"What it looks like is pretty soon this sport is going to be accepted, as any other sport," he said. That's how it's going. It's growing so fast."

Hermiston's city adult soccer league, played in springtime, which once welcomed as many teams as possible, has had to start

cutting off entrants because of how the league has grown. De La Cruz, though, wants to keep people, and kids especially, playing all year long. So he's working with Hermiston School District Director of Operations Mike Kay to open up Sandstone Middle School for fall indoor soccer. They can play two games at once there,

where their previous site, Rocky Heights Elementary, could accommodate just one.

This leads right back into De La Cruz's mission to get Latino athletes — and students, for that matter — interested in and accessing the necessary resources to go to college. If they're playing sports, they're going to

school and out of trouble. If they're going to school and out of trouble, they'll be better people and the community will be better because of it.

"My point of view is: Let's get educated," he said. "Let's educate our community. And we'll all have a better life and great success."



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