

It is not often three of us get to go deliver goods. But the first order of business was meeting with a Tribal Veteran's Service Officer for breakfast on a very rural reservation. Breakfast was good. Conversation and networking even better.



*One of the many distribution sites*

There are many stakeholders to this organization--NAVA. We are humbled by the different programs we work with and help. Not only do we help individual veterans and their families, we serve programs who provide services to veterans and their families on Northern Plains Reservations.

However, today was about Thanksgiving and that is different. Three of us got to do home deliveries and community meal deliveries which is a good time. So the day started out great and only got better. We met the big truck to unload turkeys, stuffing, vegetables and all the fixins for Thanksgiving meals. We then loaded up our truck and hit the road. We made some of the big deliveries while other programs handed out individual meals and turkeys.

This is not possible without great **trust relationships** with numerous tribal programs serving veterans partnering with us to help people. That is something very unique about us, we have those **trust relationships** from working and living in our service areas in the Northern Plains. Plus, all our our staff are enrolled Native Americans.

Whether it is Northern Cheyenne or Crow in Montana, or Rosebud or Pine Ridge in South Dakota, NAVA is there to offer a hand up to so many Native American Veterans. We do this with a variety of services from firewood to hats and gloves, to food, jackets, sleeping bags, toilet paper and the basic necessities. NAVA is about **helping people**. Our Veterans are worth it.

I also wanted to share a little bit of a story about a veteran we took a Thanksgiving meal to. His name is **Ross Afraid Of Bear**. He, like me is a United States Marine. When we arrived at his humble home out in the middle of nowhere I was a bit nervous stepping out of the truck. There must have been 20 dogs and cats around the broken down old trailer house. But I went to the door because he is someone we serve.

His grandson came to the door when I knocked. Fortunately, it was a nice dry day when we went. The mile-long dirt road leading into his house was soft dirt and very bumpy to say the least. I can tell you this, I have no idea how he gets out when it snows or rains. Yet we made it this fine day.



*Ed Vocu delivering Thanksgiving meal*

I stepped into the kitchen to find Ross in his wheelchair. See he is a disabled Vietnam Veteran missing his lower left leg. We do not talk about that. He is also blind. I once gave him my business card. He held it and thanked me for giving it to him, but

he said he is blind and cannot see anything. Yes, I felt a bit foolish the first time I met him.



*Major Ramsey and Ross Afraid of Bear*

Ross is a wonderful Marine with a good sense of humor. We joke about the Marines. We are brothers for life, both being Marines. We were both privates in the infantry as young Marines.

But he has a rough, hard life. He is blind. He is in a wheelchair. He is missing his left leg at the knee. He has bad diabetes and has to go to dialysis three times a week. I asked him how he goes. He told me his wife drives him to meet the VA bus about seven miles from his home. I must tell you, he lives in a very rural and remote location. Thank God the VA sends a bus to get him to take him to his appointments three times a week.

I must say I am humbled often by the work we do. It is truly a mission of good. We work with hundreds of good people to serve veterans on many of the Northern Plains Reservations. The people work in hospitals, shelters, social services and nutrition centers to name a few. We work with veterans' programs all over to reach out to more and more veterans all the time. And we do our very best to keep our donors informed of what we are doing to be good stewards of the resources they provide us.

I cannot thank you enough for supporting our cause. The work is never ending. But let me tell you it feels good to help people. It feels good to shake hands with a blind Marine and see a tear run down his face out of gratitude for people caring enough to help him. It sometimes brings a lump to my throat too. We at NAVA have an **absolute passion** to do **what is right** to help Native American Veterans.

On an ending note I did not even get to tell you about Wilma Thin Elk again. She is on our website in a video. We ran into her again today. She bossed us around a bit and told us about more veterans to serve. God Bless Her!



*Wilma Thin Elk Veterans Advocate!*

**Pilamaya, which is Thank You in Lakota**