



## **Al Roker of NBC's "The Today Show" stops at Phoenix Indian Center**

Story and Photos BY LOREN TAPAHE

PHOENIX--Popular national weatherman, Al Roker of the NBC "The Today Show" was in Phoenix filming his "Lend a Helping Hand" program on the early morning of April 18, 2006 while giving the weather report on the nationally televised "The Today Show." The 58-year old Phoenix Indian Center was selected for its outstanding work in the community to assist the local Indian population with needed social services. The Indian center was one of four selected from around the country this year by Roker for the recognition.

The Phoenix Indian Center received over \$60,000 worth of materials donated by various national companies including boxes of cereal, cases can goods, arts and crafts for children, crayons, office supplies, 250 backpacks, 500 T-shirts, 100 caps, two computer laptops, and a 2006 Chrysler Grand Caravan SUV and more. Over 100 people show up at the center at 3:00 AM to welcome Roker and to celebrate the Phoenix Indian Center's good fortune. Many showed up in their traditional regalia to give Roker a glimpse of the Native American culture.

The "Lend a Helping Hand" project is twofold, says Roker, "it's to first help with providing materials and needed supplies for a non-profit organization that helps in the community and second to spotlight their efforts." Roker stayed with the crowd for the entire four hours signing autographs while filming the show.

At 4:00 AM the program went live on the East coast and continued with 6 four-minute live reports from Phoenix for 3 hours up to 7 AM when the program came on air in Phoenix by delayed broadcast. The show included an interview with Patti Hibbeler, CEO of the Phoenix Indian Center, short segment about the services the center provides and several crowd shots. At one point, the Phoenix Oyate Drum group took center stage as dancers circled the drummers with Roker taking part.

Various individuals in the crowd gave to Roker a bolo tie, a painting, a Kasina carving and other items to show their appreciation for recognizing the Indian center. Miss Hopi, Jessica Onsaе gave Roker a Hopi designed pendant and also invited him to Hopi.

"This is tremendous," said Hibbeler as she hugged Roker. "It means the world to the center. Thank you for helping us."

Many times, Natives come to Phoenix searching for jobs and opportunities they can't find in their traditional home communities on the Reservations commented Patti Hibbeler, CEO of the Phoenix Indian Center. "As more and more Native people are coming from the Reservation to the urban areas, it's a foreign environment for them," she said on camera, "they are used to being around their own Native community and they need help and assistance to acclimate to the urban area."

The Phoenix Indian Center provides the "bridge between the traditional home life and the hustle-and-bustle of urban life" says Hibbeler. The center provides services in employment training; school-based education and prevention programs, GED programs, career counseling and job placement, social services case management, life skills counseling, along with Native language classes.

For more information about the Phoenix Indian Center, call 602-264-6768 or visit their web site: [www.phxindcenter.org](http://www.phxindcenter.org).