



**Burlington Northern – Santa Fe Foundation Supports Urban/Rural Cultural Exchange Program**  
*‘Provider Pals Announces BNSF Foundation \$25,000 Donation*



*(Helena, MT): Rick Bartoskewitz, General Manager of BNSF MT Division, and BNSF’s Barb Ranf, present the check to Provider Pals® Executive Director Bruce Vincent.*

(Libby, Montana) - Provider Pals, a Presidential Award winning urban/rural cultural exchange program, announced that Ft. Worth, Texas, based Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railway’s Foundation has donated \$25,000 to assist in bringing this program to middle school students throughout the nation.

Provider Pals non-profit program was piloted in rural Montana and has grown to include over 10,000 students per year in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Denver and Washington, DC. and several Montana communities including Libby, Troy, Eureka, Willow Creek and others. Provider Pals has received national attention since President Bush gave the inaugural Preserve America President’s Award to the program for its innovation and creativity in protecting and preserving America’s cultural and natural heritage. The *Wall Street Journal* has called the program ‘the most exciting educational initiative in decades.’

The mission of Provider Pals is to build a bridge of understanding between our nation’s youth and the rural resource cultures that provide the products they find on their store shelves. “Rural resource providers, representing the natural resource providing cultures of farming, mining, ranching, fishing and logging are ‘adopted’ each year by classrooms in urban and rural schools,” said Echo Venn, Provider Pals Communications Director. “After a year of learning about the life and culture of a resource worker, the students get to meet their adopted ‘provider’ in person in the spring,” she said.

Provider Pals newest program area is the addition of an exciting new web site, *Provider World*. The site, sponsored in part by the Caterpillar Foundation and the Monsanto Foundation, allows students and guests to visit farms, forests, ranches, mines and fishing operations and cultures in an interactive educational gaming format. The pilot run of *Provider World* had hundreds of thousands of kids sign up to play. The BNSF donation will allow 1,000 students from middle school classrooms engaged in Provider Pals to play and learn on that site for the next year.

“BNSF serves many of the communities where we have programming,” said Libby, Montana’s Bruce Vincent, Executive Director of Provider Pals. “This donation will enable students to engage in dialogue that enables the celebrating of similarities and the understanding of the differences between consumers and the environmental stewards that produce products for society,” he said.

“BNSF has a long history of supporting significant programs across Montana and we are pleased to participate in the Provider Pals Program which has a significant impact on building urban & rural relationships,” said Gus Melonas, BNSF Spokesman.

Echo Venn, Communications Director of Provider Pals, is excited about the BNSF Foundation donation. “Our programming is now enjoyed by students and teachers across the nation,” said Venn. “This donation will enable us to continue to facilitate cultural understanding and respect between thousands of youth and the cultures that provide the products they depend upon,” she said.

*Provider Pals® is a 501c(3) Non-Profit Education Organization that is in its seventh year of full time operation.*  
**For more information on Provider Pals, contact Bruce Vincent at (406)293-8822 or [bruce@providerpals.com](mailto:bruce@providerpals.com).**  
**You can also visit them on the web at [www.providerpals.com](http://www.providerpals.com).**

**For more information concerning the BNSF Foundation, contact Gus Melonas at 206-625-6220**