



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., advises learning from ancestors to avoid shortages, problems from severe weather emergencies

SANTA FE, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., says if Navajos can remember the lessons of their grandparents, they can avoid many of the problems associated with severe weather emergencies that tend to occur year after year.

“Growing up, I don’t remember any talk about emergencies,” he told some 300 participants at the 2010 Navajo Division of Public Safety and Emergency Management Conference at the Buffalo Thunder Resort & Casino here Tuesday. “Fifty to 60 years ago, there was no such thing as an emergency.”

The reason is because every Navajo family knew how to prepare for the coming winter by storing food from the fall harvest, gathering a large supply of firewood when the weather was good, and putting up enough livestock feed for several months. After that was done, families held ceremonies and prayed for snow, rain and were unconcerned about mud.

“They welcomed big snow, a lot of rain,” President Shirley said. “We had ceremonies to bring them on because they wanted to plant and have a good harvest.”

He said families who lived in remote areas – and most places were – got themselves ready to have access cut off.

“First of all, we prepared ourselves,” he said. “We lived off the earth. We took care of each other. We can borrow from our ancestors. They planned ahead very deliberately.”

He said families put up stores of dried peaches, pumpkin, beef jerky, corn, squash, piñon nuts, honey, cactus, and

had goat’s milk to drink. They were prepared to go four or five months in isolation.

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– Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.

“There was plenty,” he said. “That was the way our people prepared themselves for the coming snow. We knew each other, we helped each other, and we visited each other.”

He said all Navajos knew to begin to gather resources during the summertime.

“Our families a long time ago were proactive,” he said. “They planned ahead. They prepared themselves for the long winter ahead.”

Once, he said, the Navajo people were known as fierce, proud and independent. He said the people and the government need to adopt those qualities for today so that the Nation can return to standing on its own. He said chapter governments need to get Local Governance certified so they can plan for every need their people have.

"I think we have the wherewithal to do it," he said.

Today, he said, state, federal and county governments are always ready to help the Navajo Nation during emergencies, offering thanks again to New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer for their assistance during Operation Snowfall 2010.

"State governments are always there to help," the President said. "They reach out. They ask, 'What can we do to help?'"

He also thanked the Navajo Department of Emergency Management for coordinating the command center, the Navajo Department of Law Enforcement, divisions and programs that assisted and whose staff volunteered, and

NTUA, NAPI, Navajo Nation Oil & Gas Enterprise and the Fire Rock Casino for their contributions, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the road clearance.

He said the criteria for today's emergency managers is three-fold; to ensure there is no loss of life, to ensure there is no irreparable harm to anyone, and to ensure there is little or no loss of property.

"We need to go through it and we are going through it and we'll get through it," he said. "It's with it in mind to do it better."

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