



# THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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## Navajo First Lady Vikki Shirley joins 6<sup>th</sup> N.M. ‘Walk Like MADD’ to raise funds, awareness in fight against drunk driving, fatalities

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley and her staff joined some 300 participants in the Mothers Against Drunk Driving New Mexico sixth annual “Walk like MADD” event here Saturday to raise funds and save lives.

Mrs. Shirley said the event helps MADD support programs for both victims of drunk driving and programs to help prevent drunk driving and underage drinking.

“The money that’s going to be raised here will also be used on the Navajo Nation with our Navajo Nation MADD chapter,” she said. “Despite all the work that we’re doing, we’re still going to see a lot of (drunk driving.) All the money and resources coming in, we’re still going to need that to fight the crime of drunk driving.”

One in three people are affected by a drunk driver in New Mexico, she said. So the effort to educate the public about the dangers of drunk driving and underage drinking must reach everyone from infants, toddlers, school-age children to elders, communities, and even leaders.

“We just need to do what we can to educate our people about the dangers of drunk driving,” she said. “Teenagers just need to remember that they’re very important, and



*Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley and her staff walked in the Mothers Against Drunk Driving New Mexico sixth annual “Walk like MADD” event in Albuquerque on Saturday. A portion of the funds raised will go to the Navajo Nation to continue the effort to fight drunk driving and save lives.*

very important in the lives of their parents, their communities, their schools and their friends. They just need to just say no to whatever it is – alcohol, drugs. They have a whole life ahead of them. They need to look forward to the future.”

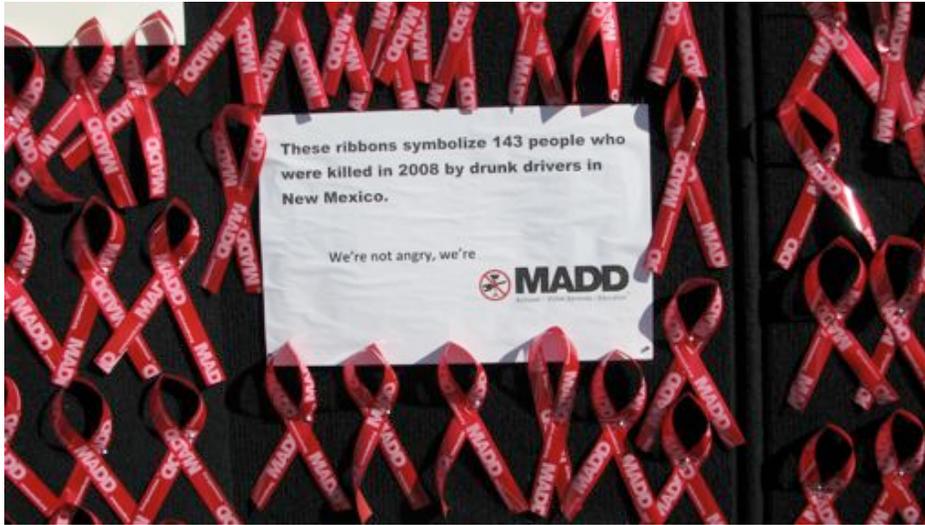
Mrs. Shirley issued a plea to students not to become involved with alcohol or drugs but to remember that their



lives are precious, and to have a full life so they can return to Navajoland to help their communities.

needed to have a strong focus, and so created the position of DWI czar.

MADD New Mexico executive director Lora Lee Ortiz said 143 lives were lost in New Mexico in 2008 because of drunk driving crashes. Staggering as that number is, she said, New Mexico alcohol-related fatalities were lower than the year



*Red ribbons adorning a placard represent the 143 people killed by drunk drivers in New Mexico in 143.*

before despite an national increase.

"It's down," she said. "We've actually reduced by 35 percent over the last four years. But you can't tell that to someone who's lost their loved one. Downward trends don't make a difference if you still losing people."

"One of the things we're trying to do is let everyone be aware that 60-to-70 percent of the fatalities are caused by someone who has never been convicted of a drunk driving offence before," Ms. Ortiz said. "So while we know repeat offenders are an issue, we really want to create awareness and somehow stop that cycle at the very beginning.

Ms. Ortiz credited New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson for launching several extremely progressive initiatives. She said New Mexico is among the most progressive states on DWI by having the first ignition interlock law, which went in effect in June 2005, and the first DWI czar, Rachel O'Connor, who was appointed in June 2004.

"The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is looking at that as a model for all 50 states now," Ms. Ortiz said. "But no matter how much progress we've made, when you lose those lives, it's very, very hard."

New Mexico DWI Czar Rachel O'Connor said Gov. Richardson felt DWI was a serious policy issue that

"There's a lot of coordination between state agencies that need to occur because virtually every state agency in New Mexico has some role in reducing DWI," she said.

She said the first five years of her job involved launching

new programs and making changes to both internal policy and legislative

policy, and working in the counties and with tribes where DWI has been the deadliest.

"We've had a nice four-year decline now of about 34 percent of alcohol-involved fatalities," Ms O'Connor said. "We're hoping to hold that and hopefully make progress in the years to come."

She said the key to reducing DWI is a combination of education, awareness, penalties and the assistance of a responsive media.

"Certainly lots of law enforcement," she added. "There have been changes in service, in terms of serving intoxicated patrons and underage people, as well.

Linda Atkinson, executive director of the non-profit DWI Resource Center, said all drivers must be aware that there are impaired drivers sharing the road with them.

A citizen's best defense against a drunk driver is to always wear a seatbelt, drive defensively, and avoid high-crash areas at high-risk times of day whenever possible, she said.

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