



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation leaders attend 108th birthday celebration for Nellie Rose of Black Mesa, Ariz.

"Nellie Rose is a living treasure." — Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan

BLACK MESA, Ariz. — Navajo Nation Council Delegate Amos Johnson participated in the 108th birthday party of lifelong Black Mesa resident Nellie Rose.

"I'm privileged and honored to have celebrated our grandmother," Johnson said. "We've learned a lot from her and have learned the secrets of longevity."

The birthday celebration was held at the Black Mesa Community School where family and friends gathered for a luncheon. The celebration included six generations of Nellie Rose's family. Johnson took the moment to remind the audience to take care of their parents and grandparents.

"Give them a lot of love," said Johnson.

Johnson presented Nellie Rose with a coral necklace with a small heart pendant. A white Pendleton shawl was also presented to Nellie Rose on behalf of Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan.

"Nellie Rose is a living treasure," Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan said. "It is an amazing thing that she is still with us today. She has led a good life and has worked hard for her family."

Nellie Rose can still walk and can carry on conversations with her family. Her eyesight has dwindled over the years, but she can still recognize the voices of her family.

"We just really appreciate her," said Rosie Bitsui, 50, who is a paternal granddaughter to Nellie Rose. The day was emotional for family and friends who cried tears of joy and thankfulness for Nellie Rose.

Rose was born in Kitsili, near Black Mesa and attended boarding school as a child. She had livestock and sheep throughout her life and was a foster grandparent at the Black Mesa Community School. At the school, she taught students about weaving, traditional recipes and Navajo philosophy. Many of the children she taught are now adults with their own children, and said they still remember the stories she told when she was working at the school.



Navajo Council Delegate Amos Johnson presents a birthday gift to Nellie Rose during her 108th birthday party on Nov. 15, 2008, in Black Mesa, Ariz. (Photo by Natasha Kaye Johnson)

Her family said she is very active in her old age, and walked several miles everyday when she was 98 years old. Being active and living by teachings of the Navajo philosophy are what the family credit to her longevity.

"It's a blessing to have her at this age," said Larry Whitehair, 38, grandson to Nellie Rose. Many said her birthday served as an informal family reunion and allowed them to reflect on "k'e".

Family and friends were honored that leaders from the Navajo Nation attended the event. Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. was also in attendance and presented Nellie Rose with a Pendleton shawl.

"This is really special to have our Navajo Nation leaders here to celebrate her birthday," said Frank White, 58, grandson to Nellie Rose. Radmilla Cody, award-winning recording artist, also attended the event with her grandmother. She is also a granddaughter to Nellie Rose.

"Come bless yourselves with grandma," Cody advised the young children in both Navajo and English. Cody also sang "Happy Birthday" in the Navajo language before the cake was presented. Nellie Rose blew out her own candles.

"Ahe'hee," she said. "Thank you everybody for being here."

Nellie Rose was presented gifts from family and friends, and then she hit a piñata with a bat. Her great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren followed their grandma in hitting the piñata.

"Everybody looks happy for her because she's 108 years old," said Melanie Yellowhair, 16, great, great granddaughter.

Speaker Morgan said he hopes the young grandchildren of Nellie Rose will seek the traditional knowledge their grandmother has — the knowledge once passed onto her by her own grandparents.

"I pray they will see what a special blessing their grandmother is and I pray they will actively seek out the knowledge that has helped their grandmother lead a long and honorable life," said Morgan.



Radmilla Cody, award-winning recording artist, presents a turquoise horned toad to Nellie Rose and a music CD at her 108th birthday in Black Mesa, Ariz. (Photo by Natasha Johnson)