



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

21st Navajo Nation Council sponsors pow-wow at 62nd Annual Navajo Nation Fair

"We are always striving to improve and want to provide the best possible experience at the pow-wow."

— Ervin Keeswood Sr., council delegate for Tse Daa Kaan Chapter

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Nancy Ahboah, 67, was all smiles as the dances at Navajo Nation Pow-wow began to wind down on Sunday evening. Her smile brightened when she heard her name called by the announcer for fifth place in the Women's Golden Age category.

"This pow-wow has gotten better every year," said Ahboah, who is from Salt River, Ariz. "There's grass in the dancing arena and the parking has really improved."

Ahboah was particularly thrilled with the food and treats pow-wow participants were given each morning of the four-day event.

"We got rations! How about that?!" said Ahboah. Each morning, committee members trekked to each of the tents and gave families eggs, bread, bacon, soda, coffee and other goodies.

The food rations were a nice surprise of hospitality to many of the pow-wow participants, not to mention the high pay-outs and the new improvements to the pow-wow grounds.

"It's just to help them because it costs a lot to get from here to there," said Ervin M. Keeswood Sr., who is serving his second year as committee director of the Navajo Nation Pow-wow. Keeswood is also the council delegate for the Tse Daa Kaan Chapter.

Keeswood has been active within the pow-wow circuit for years and comes from a family of singers. He was asked to volunteer for the position last year and since he jumped on board, one of his main initiatives has been to bring more sponsors to the pow-wow. His efforts have been successful and with the support of sponsors, the payout has jumped from \$87,000 to \$170,000 in just one year.

"We got a substantial amount that we're paying out," Keeswood said. "We've basically doubled our pay-out since last year."

The advertised pay-outs attracted over 1,000 people from all over the Navajo Nation, the United States and Canada. One of the primary sponsors was the 21st Navajo Nation Council.

Shayna Meguinis, 17, of Alberta, Canada made her first trip to the Navajo Nation this year to attend the pow-wow. She was invited by outgoing Navajo Nation pow-wow royalty.

"I came to show them support and represent the Tsuutina Nation," Meguinis said. "Everyone made us feel welcome here and made sure we had everything to get cleaned up."



Unidentified pow-wow dancers prepare to dance during the 62nd Annual Navajo Nation Fair pow-wow on Sept. 6, 2008. (Photos by Natasha Kaye Johnson)

Local pow-wow trail goers were equally impressed. Robert Tree Cody, 57, from Navajo, N.M., was happy to come back.

"They take care of the people there," said Tree Cody, who placed second in the Men's Golden Age championship category. "They accommodated everybody."

There were also several positive comments on the improvements to the pow-wow grounds area.

As soon as the Fourth of July celebrations ended, the committee began working diligently to finish upgrade projects.

Some of the new improvements include, grass in the dancing area, a gated arena for dancers and singers, more allotted camping grounds, tables for campers and a newly added road coarse base for unpredictable weather.

"We brought in a few tons of dirt to lift up the whole camping area so we don't have the mud puddles," Keeswood said. "They really loved it."

The only improvement which received mixed feelings was the gated arena. Spectators said it makes it difficult to see, but the singing groups were happy with the gate since it helps to prevent people from stealing equipment and helps prevent too many spectators from crowding their singing area. Keeswood said the committee always makes it a point to talk and visit with pow-wow participants and attendees for improvements.

"We are always striving to improve and want to provide the best possible experience at the pow-wow," said Keeswood.

The committee is already talking about upgrading the bleachers for next year's event.

"It has been a year-round activity," Keeswood added. "Once it's over, you have to start raising funds for the next year."

Alvin Windy Boy, 57, served as this year's arena director. It was his first time directing at the pow-wow.

"I've worked in pow-wow for over 40 years and the people here are friendly," said Windy Boy, who is from Rocky Boy, Mont. "In terms of fairness and equitability, it's the best and because so, it attracts the best singers and dancers."

He complimented the other activities going on at the fair from the 4H-show to the rodeo.

"There's something here for every kind of discipline and it certainly gives credence to the word fair," said Windy Boy.

"The songs were powerful and we were happy to see so many women participate this year," said Anderson, who is also the council delegate for Fort Defiance. "I really took notice to that, since this year's theme revolved around the strength of our Navajo women."

He said the gourd dance and pow-wow was a major attraction for families with children. Jessica Johnson, 12, came up with her family from Chinle, Ariz. She has been on the pow-wow circuit since she was two-years-old and has been winning consistently ever since, taking third in this year's Junior Girls Fancy Dance category and winning \$100. Amber Keeswood, 8, from Tuba City, placed in the junior girls traditional and was excited when she heard she placed.

Leila Help-Tulley, legislative staff assistant with the Office of the Speaker, was thrilled to see so many young people participating.

"It's wonderful to see our youth engaging in positive activities and seeing how thrilled they are when they are rewarded with money and encouraged by their peers and family members," Help-Tulley said. "I'm always so excited to help with the pow-wow."

Keeswood was happy to receive positive feedback from attendees and participants and hopes people will share their pow-wow experience with others when they go home, so the event will become larger each year.

"We want people leaving here with a good impression of the Navajo Nation and the Navajo people," said Keeswood.