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**NAVAJO NATION PUBLIC SAFETY SUMMIT HONORS BEST PRACTICES IN
PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM**

The Office of the Chief Justice and Navajo Technical University won an Honorable Mention for Best Practices during the Navajo Nation Public Safety Summit for implementing the Navajo Court Transcription Program.

The awards for Best Practices were announced during the Navajo Nation Public Safety Summit, where participants gathered to discuss public safety issues and make goals and objectives for the coming year. Nominations for best practices and success stories were solicited in January by the organizers of the Public Safety Summit with about 18 nominations made. The top four best practices and four honorable mentions were honored on Wednesday, January 31, 2018.

Associate Justice Eleanor Shirley accepted the award on behalf of the Office of Chief Justice. She noted that the Judicial Branch obtained funds from the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2014 and the branch and NTU entered into a memorandum of agreement to begin the pilot program.

In explaining the need for the program, Shirley spoke about the appeals process saying that when a case gets appealed, the record from the district court is sent to the Supreme Court. "When we get those records, there's a transcript, and in the transcript it usually talks about what was said in the district court proceeding. In some cases, you will see a section that will say, 'Spoken in Navajo.' As an appellate judge looking at the record, it's difficult to figure out what was said in Navajo because that particular portion was not transcribed. It's for that purpose that we are trying to bridge this gap," she said.

The collaboration with Navajo Technical University resulted in the development of a 32-hour Navajo Court Transcription Program. The program included courses in technical writing, American Indian law, transcription and interpretation/translation.

Shirley noted that seven Judicial Branch employees applied and became the first graduates of the program in December 2017. She also said that it was a team effort for the branch because courts had to allow the staff to attend for an entire semester.

“This preserves the testimony of our Navajo speaking population and ensures that their voices are heard,” said Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne following the awards ceremony. “Our Navajo Nation naat’áanii have spoken that all elements of the government must learn, practice and educate on our Diné bizaad. This is how our branch will help to preserve our oral narratives and Diné teachings to protect Diné sovereignty.”

Dr. Wesley Thomas, dean of graduate studies, and Dr. Elmer Guy, NTU president, were instrumental in ensuring that the program was implemented at the university.

The Ramah public safety system won three of the eight awards. The Ramah public safety team, including Jennifer Henry from the prosecutor’s office, Ramah Police Chief Darren Soland, social services staff and Ramah Department of Corrections, won an Honorable Mention award for embracing open communication, individual accountability and working together to strengthen the public safety system in the community.

Ramah Public Safety and Pine Hill Clinic won one of the top four awards for Best Practices for implementing medical screenings for inmates before they enter detention. This practice helps provide more comprehensive medical treatment for inmates, particularly for those whom have issues with substance and alcohol abuse.

Ramah District Court’s Amnesty Day also won one of the top four awards. The award was shared by the Ramah District Court, Ramah Prosecutor’s Office and Ramah Police Department for their parts in collaborating the two-day event which allowed community members to resolve outstanding warrants without fear of being arrested.

Judge William J.J. Platero was praised in the nomination description for his willingness to openly communicate directly with the public safety team on the Amnesty Day project. The nomination description also noted that the Ramah staff attorney put a lot of work into finalizing the warrant lists and the probation officer was present throughout the entire two days in case she was needed.

James Leslie and Eukerison Tsinajine of the Navajo Department of Health Fort Defiance Office were awarded one of the top Best Practices awards as members of the Fort Defiance Crisis Response Team. As team members, they implemented a Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral Treatment Model for service calls and assist in delivery of mental health related services across the Navajo Nation. According to Dr. Glorinda Segay, who nominated Leslie and Tsinajine, they are members of a team that is on call after hours, on weekends and on holidays to help address issues such as suicide and other mental health issues.

Lt. Robbin Preston of the Department of Corrections was the final winner of the top award for Best Practices. Lt. Preston was recognized for his efforts to bring in programs that promote essential life skills and successful transition for inmates at the Tuba City Correctional facility. In her nomination form, Department of Corrections Director Delores Greyeyes said that DOC has to often tap into local resources to address substance abuse issues that many of their clients have and that Lt. Preston has been instrumental and creative in implementing a number of programs at the Tuba City facility. She noted that the facility has developed a gardening program with local resources and that DOC staff and inmates have been involved in volunteer work. One of the biggest accomplishments was an inmate graduating with an associate of arts degree while serving his sentence, Greyeyes stated.

Other Honorable Mentions went to Navajo Nation Police Sgt. Wallace Billie and Chief Prosecutor Gertrude Lee. Sgt. Billie was recognized as a key partner in increasing capacity and community engagement in the public safety system, especially for participating in Building Communities of Hope and advocating for Crisis Response Teams. Lee was recognized for her part in building a team ethic among staff and filling vacant positions within the prosecutor's office. When Lee came on as chief prosecutor, there were only seven legal staff and within a little over a year, Lee now has 19 legal staff positions filled, according to the nomination form.

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