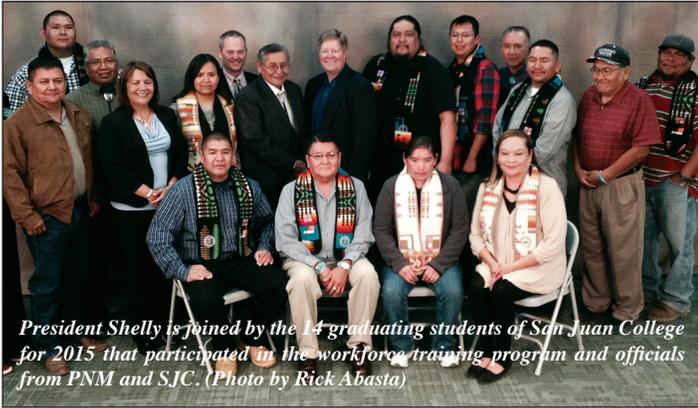




FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 April 17, 2015

President Shelly praises PNM-NN Workforce Training Program



President Shelly is joined by the 14 graduating students of San Juan College for 2015 that participated in the workforce training program and officials from PNM and SJC. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

FARMINGTON, N.M.— Fourteen students from San Juan College are graduating after studying various fields of the energy industry.

An informal crowd gathered at the Henderson Performing Arts Center at San Juan College on the evening of April 16 to celebrate student success.

For the second year, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly joined PNM representatives at San Juan College to honor student recipients of scholarships from the PNM-Navajo Nation Workforce Training Program.

The program was created as a response to the shutdown of two units at San Juan Generating Station in 2017. PNM invested \$1 million for scholarships over a five-year period for students seeking a career in energy and attending college at Navajo Technical University and San Juan College.

Students participating in the program are seeking careers in energy, construction, manufacturing and technology. The program began in 2014 to ensure the Four Corners has a trained workforce for existing and emerging jobs, especially Navajos.

“Two years ago, PNM approached the Navajo Nation with a great idea to partner with regional colleges, San Juan College and Navajo Technical University, to prepare students for exciting career in the energy industry,” President Shelly said.

The scholarships, he said, were a response to federal visibility standards that will result in the closure of two of the four units at San Juan Generating Station in 2017.

“The closure means that we must find new ways to produce energy and cleaner methods to transform coal into energy. Our young Navajo students will help us in this area,” President Shelly said.

The sale of coal by the Navajo Nation to energy generating stations in the Four Corners and Page is a large part of the Navajo economy, funding direct services in the tribal government.

This industry provides high paying jobs that stimulate the tribal economy from taxes, leases and the purchase of goods and services from local businesses by these workers. For every job created in the energy sector, there are five other jobs created to support that position.

“These students studying for careers in the energy sector are the shining hope of the future,” President Shelly said. “We must invest in their success and encourage them in their future careers.

“Thank you to the students here for deciding on a career in energy. You hold the key to our success for the years to come,” he added.

President Shelly thanked PNM for their vision and investment, which he said spoke volumes for the company because they chose to stand by the Navajo Nation and ensure they were prepared for the changes to come.

Ron Darnell, senior vice president of public policy at PNM, said the celebration of student achievement was the most fun and rewarding part of his job.

“An educated and trained workforce in the Four Corners area builds a strong economic base that empowers our communities to shape careers and be productive, whether here in Farmington or on the Navajo Nation,” Darnell said.

He explained the premise behind the training program was to ensure a trained workforce for the changes to the energy industry in the Four Corners. The journey began more than four years ago, he said, when PNM was debating state and federal proposals to meet federal visibility standards.

Before deciding on executing a proposal, PNM said the plans must be environmentally responsible, minimize the cost impact to customers and cushion the economic impact to the Four Corners region.

The retirement of two of the four units a San Juan Generating Station will reduce water use and seven different emissions by 50 percent. The N.M. Environment Improvement Board and Environmental Protection Agency approved the plan. It is now before the N.M. Public Regulation Commission for approval.

“Throughout this process, President Shelly consistently emphasized his concerns about job losses and the potential adverse impacts to the Four Corners and Navajo economy,” Darnell said. “Today’s workforce training program is the result of strong collaboration.”

In 2014, 77 students at San Juan College received scholarships from the program and nine students graduated. This year, 46 students participated and 14 students will graduate.

Gayle Dean, executive director of the San Juan College Foundation, said the program enriches the lives of students and their families.

“This partnership aligns with San Juan College’s strategic directions of student success, community partnerships, economic development and valuing people,” Dean said.

She said students have the opportunity to achieve career goals for licensure in civil drafting, commercial drivers licensing, engineering or geology.

“Today more than 120 San Juan College students have directly benefitted from this program and we are excited about the next three years,” Dean said.