



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., wishes young Boy Scout success in quest to have his Navajo beliefs acknowledged

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., has offered his support to a nine-year-old Navajo boy who hopes to earn a Boy Scouts of America religious emblem that acknowledges his spiritual commitment to his traditional Navajo corn pollen way of life as well as his faith in *Azeé Bee Nahagha*.

“It’s good to see a family and a young man like Kinlichiiinii who live so far away from Navajoland proud of who they are, proud of the teachings of their elders and grandparents, and proud to carry them on,” President Shirley said. “It is through individual endeavor like this young man’s that we will have Navajos speaking their language and continuing their way of life 50 years, 100 years from now. I appreciate the Boy Scouts of America for supporting this young man as he charts a new path for others to follow.”

Kinlichiiinii Ashkii John of Clermont, Fla., has achieved the highest rank in Cub Scouts – Webelos – and is about to become a Boy Scout, one of the most important things in his life right now, his mother says.

And because many of his friends are now earning emblems that acknowledge their religious faiths, he wants to earn one that recognizes his Navajo faith, too.

Although emblems exist for 35 other religious affiliations, no emblem exists for Native religion, or the traditional



Kinlichiiinii Ashkii John of Clermont, Fla., visited President Shirley’s office to inform him about his quest to establish and obtain a Boy Scouts Religious Emblem that recognizes his faith in traditional Navajo spiritual way of life or Azeé Bee Nahagha. Traveling with his, from left to right, is his sister Shawntylle, 16, his dad Lester John, his mother Melvina John and his oldest sister Eileen, 19.

Navajo spiritual way of life or *Azeé Bee Nahagha*, both which his family practices.

So with the help of his mother and father, Melvina and Lester John, Kinlichiiinii decided to help establish the emblem himself.

"I want to do this for my faith," Kinlichiiinii said. "I want to do this for other boys."

Mrs. John said it's important to her and her husband that their children do well in all aspects of life, and having a traditional foundation of faith is key to that.

"Being that we're Navajos, we talk and pray how kids are losing their tradition, their language, and the faith is fading away as well," she said. "So we figured this would be another excellent opportunity to go through Boy Scouts of America to reach out nationwide, not only to the Navajo kids but also to other tribes."

David Richardson, director of Religious Relationships for Boy Scouts of America, explained that the religion emblems actually belong to the religious organizations themselves rather than to the Boy Scouts directly. It is the religious organizations that determine the requirements for earning the emblems rather than the Boy Scouts.

"All we do is approve the wearing of a religious emblem on the uniform," he said.

That entails having a volunteer committee review the criteria established by the religious organization to ensure that they conform to the values and teachings of the Boy Scouts, he said.

The Boy Scouts website – scouting.org – says BSA strives "to develop American citizens who are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit; have a high degree of self-reliance as evidenced in such qualities as initiative, courage, and resourcefulness; and have personal values based on religious concepts."

To begin the process, Kinlichiiinii and his parents organized meetings last weekend with traditional Navajo medicinemen and ABN roadmen. Kinlichiiinii also gave a motivational talk at the ABN Youth Conference in Teesto.

"It went wonderfully. It was beautiful. It was a great success," Ms. John said. "The conference gave youth the chance to look at themselves and say, 'What difference can I make?'"

Among the people they visited with was David Clark, president of *Azeé Bee Nahagha* of the Diné Nation.

"This young man has my blessing," Mr. Clark said. "I think it's a good idea, a very good idea, especially at this date and time. We need something for our youngsters to go by."

Mr. Clark, a former Boy Scout himself, said this is a needed requirement and that he was pleased the Boy Scouts will move forward with this.



Kinlichiiinii John is a proud member of the Central Florida Council, Rolling Hills District, Pack 133, Den 1

"*Azeé Bee Nahagha* is based on a health care system that's related to the development a young person's mind, physical conditioning, being strong mentally and physically, and always being prepared for what's coming up in the future," he said. "This is just in line with our medicineman's philosophy. That can be related into Navajo."

The family also met in Tsale with Anthony Lee, Sr., president of the Diné Medicine Men Association, and said the organization has already begun work on the emblem, incorporating the fundamental thoughts of Navajo teachings into its design.

"They want it to be really meaningful and simple so kids Ken's age will appreciate its meaning," Ms. John said. "This is a way for them to reach out so one of these days one of these boys can become a medicine man."

"Everywhere we go we have total support on this whole thing," she said. "Everyone is in favor of carrying on the tradition and handing it on to the next generation."

She said the next meeting has been set for noon on Aug. 13 at the Leupp Chapter House.

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