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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., receives tribal leadership technology award at 20th RES 2006

LAS VEGAS, Nev. – In recognition of his efforts to promote information, communications and technology among indigenous nations around the world, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., was presented with the 2006 American Indian Tribal Leadership Award at the RES2006 conference here last week.

The President received the ICT Leadership award for groundbreaking achievements and international relations from the National Center on American Indian Enterprise Development at the 20th annual Reservation Economic Summit & American Indian Business Trade Fair here on Feb. 8.

The week-long conference attracted approximately 2,500 participants and 340 trade fair exhibitors representing tribes, Native businesses, government agencies and corporations.

Among the dozens of government and tribal speakers was U.S. Interior Secretary Gale Norton and Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas Dorr. Also appearing was Ohkay Owingeh Governor Joe Garcia, who is the new president of the National Congress of American Indians, Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation and former NCAI president, and Ernest L. Stevens, Jr., chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association.

“The world is changing,” Under Secretary Dorr said in a keynote address. “New technologies, new opportunities are transforming rural America, making it a land of opportunity. IT is producing the most radical decentralization of information in human history. Today, data can be shared easily across great distances.”



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., received the 2006 American Indian Tribal Leadership ICT Award at this year's RES2006 conference in Las Vegas, Nev., for ICT achievements and international relations.



USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas Dorr

President Shirley was presented with the leadership award by NCAIED Chairman Ronald J. Solimon, a member of the Laguna Pueblo, and NCAIED President Kenneth E. Robbins, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

"ICT is a reality for us," the President said in a keynote following the presentation. "I've seen and know that the availability of information, communication and technology will advance the quality of life for all of our people. We are now the largest wireless communications network in the world by far."

"ICT is a reality for us. Everywhere across our lands people are

The President said that when the Navajo Nation's wireless, satellite-based project began in 2002, only 22 percent of Navajo families had telephones, only 15 percent had computers and only 10 percent had Internet access.

Today, any Navajo who wants an e-mail address can have one for free, and free wireless access is available at all 110 Navajo chapters.

"Everywhere across our lands people are using this technology to take distance education classes, e-commerce, communicate with family and friends," he said. "Many of my people are getting bachelor degrees, even masters degrees, at home."

He said degrees and education are the means to independence and sustaining oneself. That's what the Internet has done for Navajos, he said.

Companies like Overstock.com and Worldstock.com have more than 600 Navajo artists who sell their jewelry, Navajo rugs, pottery and other wares online, Dr. Shirley said.

"The Navajo Nation has demonstrated to the world that a people who value culture, language, and tradition can use satellite and wireless technology to help maintain their way of life," he said.

Last November, President Shirley was invited to Tunis, Tunisia, by the Observatory for Cultural and Audiovisual Communications. There he and Navajo Nation Council delegates Ervin Keeswood, chairman of the Navajo Government



Nancy Plon, Federal Communications Commission project coordinator for the Federal Rural Wireless Outreach Initiative, for the past three years recipient of NCAIED Volunteer of the Year Award. This year she received the National Center Board of Directors Appreciation Award for the work she's done to organize RES2006. Presenting her award with President Shirley and First Lady Vikki Shirley is NCAIED President Kenneth E. Robbins.

Services Committee, and George Arthur, chairman of the Navajo Resources Committee, signed two MOUs with OCCAM and the International Telecommunication Union.

This established the Navajo Nation as the first indigenous nation to become a formal member of the ITU, which is a United Nations organization.

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In addition, the World Summit on the Information Society Indigenous Steering Committee asked President Shirley to represent the world's 370 million indigenous people at the summit before the UN General Assembly.

"The MOUs between OCCAM and Navajo Nation is an important step toward partnering with others to replicate our experience with the rest of the world," Dr. Shirley said.

Both he and First Lady Vikki Shirley spoke on a panel titled "Technologies to Build Stronger Communities." The panel discussed how tribal communities deliver these technologies to their people through wireless broadband applications, highlighting the projects discussed in the previous sessions.

"My vision, my hope, is simply this: that many world leaders will come to see the primary role of Indigenous people, with the Navajo Nation as the example, as the incubators of the human spirit, rather than factories for the production of more material goods and services." Mrs. Shirley said. "This is true self-sustainability and sovereignty."

Coordinating the conference's Communication Technologies session was Nancy Plon, who has worked for the Federal Communications Commission for more than 20 years. She is the FCC's Project Coordinator for the Federal Rural Wireless Outreach Initiative. This is a partnership between the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture rural Utilities Service and the FCC's Wireless Telecommunications Bureau.

Her efforts to expedite the development of wireless communications throughout rural areas will benefit Native nations who currently lack access to the Internet and the economic and social opportunities they provide.

Because of her work, she was presented with the RES2006 NCAIED Board of Directors Appreciation Award. She has been the recipient of the National Center's Volunteer of the Year Award for the three year in a row.

The RES 2006 Information and Communications Technologies sessions also included:

- **Technologies that Empower Business Success:** This panel discussed how Native American enterprises have kept their competitive edge by adapting technologies to their business needs, how they financed these technologies, and how the technologies produce returns on their investments through increased productivity.
- **Technologies to Promote Education and Preserve Tribal Culture:** The panel discussed how tribal schools and colleges use technology to bring teachers into the classroom, provide technical training and facilitate on-line research, and how tribal museums, language programs and cultural preservation initiatives use technology to preserve tribal cultural traditions.
- **Technologies to Support Tribal Self Governance:** This panel showed how tribal justice systems, emergency response services, healthcare systems, e-government, resource management and environmental protection are strengthened through technology.

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