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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Tax Commission Executive Director resigns, wife to pursue teaching certificate, Master's degree at ASU

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Mark Graham, the executive director of the Office of Navajo Tax Commission, has resigned to move with his family to Phoenix so that his wife Cheryl can pursue her teaching certificate and Master's degree at Arizona State University.

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., presented Mr. Graham with a silver and turquoise bolo tie at his farewell dinner Thursday. He last day on the job was Friday.

The President praised Mr. Graham's skill and knowledge, and thanked him for helping to bring more than \$70 million into the Navajo Nation's coffers over the past three years.

"Mark always brings a high degree of integrity, professionalism and knowledge to every task," the President said. "We wish him and his family well as they pursue higher education, and look forward to their return to Navajoland. We'll miss him."

Mr. Graham has accepted a similar position with the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community. He said he moved his family to Phoenix just after Christmas and has been commuting on weekends for the past eight weeks.

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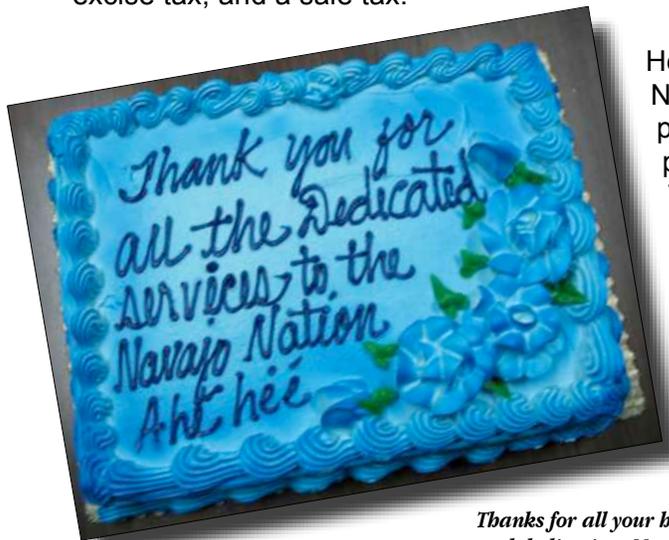
– Navajo President
Joe Shirley, Jr.



Mark Graham receives certificate of appreciation and Pendleton blanket with a Navajo Nation seal from the Office of the President and Vice President. Presenting the plaque is OPVP staff assistant Angie Sanford.

As executive director of the Navajo Tax Commission, he administered six departments that include administration, accounting, auditing, compliance, valuation and legal.

These departments, in turn, administer seven of the Navajo Nation's taxes. These are the possessory interest tax, business activity tax, oil and gas severance tax, tobacco product tax, hotel occupancy tax, fuel excise tax, and a sale tax.



Thanks for all your hard work and dedication, Mark. Aht'hee!

He said about 65 percent of the revenue generated goes into Navajo Nation general fund. The hotel tax of about \$1 million per year goes to the Navajo Tourism Office. About \$11 million per year from the fuel excise tax goes to the Navajo Transportation Department to maintain roads, and \$4.5 million per year from the sales retail tax is distributed to chapters.

There are about 1,500 taxpayers on the Navajo Nation, he said. Some service providers, such as medicinemen and health care, (drug or providers), food distribution and WIC sales are exempted, he said. Other small businesses, such as door-to-door cosmetics sales and burrito sellers, are also untaxed, he said. Vehicle and mobile home sales are also untaxed. In all, there are 16 exemptions, he said.

But the office tries to work with potential taxpayers to let them know of the Navajo Nation law rather than to work against them, he said.

"It's always been my view that if there are no taxpayers, or we chase them away, then we don't have any work to do," he said. "It's been very interesting, very enjoyable. I enjoy accounting, I enjoy tax and I enjoy law."

Mr. Graham was appointed to his position by President Shirley in June 2003. He said his wife hopes to complete her Master's degree by May through an accelerated ASU program. Her goal is to return to the Navajo Nation to teach. The couple has a five-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter.

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