



**JOE SHIRLEY, JR.**  
*President*

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*Vice-President*

## THE NAVAJO NATION

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### Nearly 200 young cowboys, cowgirls take home awards from Indian Junior Rodeo Association banquet

**CHURCH ROCK, N.M.** – Not only were parents letting their babies grow up to be cowboys and cowgirls at the Indian Junior Rodeo Association awards banquet at Red Rock State Park Saturday night, they couldn't have been prouder to do it.



***Kylie Yazzie holds three of her trophies won at the Indian Junior Rodeo Association Awards Banquet at Red Rock State Park on Saturday. Kylie also sang the National Anthem at the opening of the banquet.***

More than 180 kids between the ages of 5 and 18 took home trophies, buckles, jackets, breast collars, saddle blankets and a few lucky ones got saddles. IJRA Rodeo Queen Tanya Silversmith hauled away a two-horse trailer. And every one got a handshake from Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James and Miss Indian New Mexico Fern Spencer.

But the takings weren't just a raffle or door prize. These kids earned them through skill and good times as they competed throughout the rodeo season and racked up points.

More than 500 people showed up for the awards dinner in boots, hats and Wranglers despite competition from the AIRCA Finals Rodeo and awards banquet in Cortez, Colo., and basketball games in Gallup

Dr. Shirley told the young cowboys and cowgirls that even if they didn't win their event, "you're still a winner in my book because you're eating the dirt and trying your best."

He said it takes effort to remain physically fit to compete but that is the teaching of the Navajo people. He urged them to use the power of prayer taught to them by their parents and grandparents to help them in rodeo and in life.

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**President Shirley, Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James and IJRA Rodeo Queen Tanya Silversmith with saddle winners five-year-old Wade Begay and 11-year-old Katty Plummer.**

too, urged the kids to pay attention to their parents' teachings.

"They've lived life," she said. "They're trying to protect you. Love and respect your parents because they're the givers of life."



**Jacob Todechine, son of Darryl and Jolynn Todechine, and owner of Jacob's Custom Leather, looking sharp in string tie.**

IJRA President Lance Yazzie said the 35-year-old organization is the largest Native American junior rodeo association in the country. He said it is run entirely by parent volunteers who were pleased the Navajo President took the time to recognize the kids.

"I'd like to thank the President for coming out and remembering these kids in this way," he said. "I think a lot of these kids enjoyed that a big official like him could come out and be a part of this association."

Mr. Yazzie said the motto of the IJRA is

"enhancing our native youth's lives through junior rodeo." He said parents spend a lot of time teaching the kids the dos and don'ts inside and outside the rodeo grounds, how to treat your animals with care and respect, and what good sportsmanship is all about.

He said IJRA has more than 220 members this year. Of that, several of the members go on to various rodeo finals and championships every year.

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Most of all, he said, is that a person has to respect himself or herself.

"You're all winners. You're all champions," he said. "There are many more seasons ahead of you. There's every chance in the world to become a world champion."

Rachelle James told the young cowboys and cowgirls to always do their best in competition but not to criticize others.

"Listen to your parents," she said. "You have your prayers. Keep your smile. Run every day so you can stay physically fit. Drink water, not those sodas."

Fern Spencer told the kids how important they were to their parents.

"That word 'shiyahze' means a lot to a Navajo woman," she said. "It's your heart. It's your soul."

She said if mothers don't see their children for several days, their hearts ache for them. She,



**Apryl Largo presents trailer keys to Tanya Silversmith**