



JOE SHIRLEY, JR.
President

FRANK J. DAYISH, JR.
Vice-President

THE NAVAJO NATION

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Contact: George Hardeen
Communications Director
Office – 928-871-7917
Cell – 928-309-8532
georgehardeen@opvp.org

Navajo First Lady joins New Mexico First Lady to celebrate publication of children books on diabetes prevention

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – The first ladies of the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico teamed up to read selections from author Georgia Perez’s new children’s books series on diabetes prevention.

First Lady Vikki Shirley and New Mexico First Lady Barbara Richardson joined Ms. Perez last Thursday to celebrate the release of her Eagle Book series. The event was sponsored by the Indian Health Service’s Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention, the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the First Book National Book Bank.

“I’m real glad that First Lady Richardson is doing this for Native Americans and for me to be a part of this wonderful occasion in educating our people,” First Lady Shirley said.

Mrs. Shirley said reading is important and healthy and that she is excited to have these books published to promote healthy lifestyle and prevention of diabetes.

She works closely with First Book, a national nonprofit organization with the mission to give children from low-income families the opportunity to read and own their first new books. First Book provides an ongoing supply of new books to children participating in community-based mentoring, tutoring, and family literacy programs. In November 2005, the First Lady received her first free books, which were distributed throughout the Navajo Nation.

Ms. Perez, a New Mexico native, has seen her four books published by the First Book National Book Bank for distribution to all Native country and the world. The book illustrates the prevention and safety message to ages in Native country.



Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley and New Mexico First Lady Barbara Richardson read from the Eagle Books by author Georgia Perez. The series of books educate children about diabetes and its prevention.

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Since 1994, she has specialized in diabetes education with the Native American Diabetes Project of the University of New Mexico. Between 1975 and 1994, she was the Community Health Representative for Nambe Pueblo.

Ms. Perez calls her series of children's stories the "Eagle Books." In these stories, a wise eagle assumes the role of a tribal elder in the time-honored Native American tradition of using storytelling to pass on tribal culture and to teach lessons of life.

Ms. Perez says she was inspired in part by telling stories to her three grandsons. She lives with her husband, Edward Perez, in Nambe Pueblo, N.M., a tribe of 600 people.

The Story of the Eagle Books
Diabetes Prevention Stories for Native American Children
By Georgia Perez

Traditionally, stories were told in winter by Native Americans to pass on their history, traditions, and culture to future generations because Native languages were only spoken, not written. The stories in the Eagle Books came from a recurring dream I had and from the dreams of many Native Indian communities whose members wanted to make life better for people dealing with diabetes.



Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley, New Mexico First Lady Barbara and author Georgia Perez celebrate the publication of the children's series of "Eagle Books."

them learn how important it is to have healthy eating and physical activity in their lives. In July 2001, Janette Carter passed away and never had an opportunity to see this dream become reality. But it did. She would be glad.

In 2002, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention formed partnership with the New Mexico State Diabetes Prevention and Control Program and the Office of Native American Diabetes Program at the University of New Mexico to plan for the series of children's books. These books would contain healthy lifestyle messages to help children as well as family and pcommunity members begin making positive changes in their lives. The underlying messages would be to prevent obesity and diabetes.

The partnerships have expanded even more broadly to include book illustrators Patrick Rolo and Lisa A. Fifield, Native Americans from Minnetonka, Minnesota; Westat, in Atlanta, Georgia; the Indian Health Services, Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention, based in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and the Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee, represented by leaders across the country. Partners and communities are involved from all directions: north, south, east and west.

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In 1989, I met a wonderful physician, Dr. Janette Carter. In 1994, I started to work with her to develop a diabetes education curriculum funded by the National Institutes of Health. During the development of the curriculum, I dreamed of being visited by an eagle. The eagle was showing me how life for Native Americans used to be and what Native people can do to prevent diabetes now.

Dr. Carter expressed a need for the diabetes curriculum to be more culturally tailored for the population that we were trying to reach. I told her about the dream and I had been having. It was then that the original story, "Through the Eyes of the Eagle," was written and woven throughout our first curriculum.

The story broke down barriers that people had about health and diabetes. When we began with the story and then talked about diabetes, we found that the children listened intently. They were eager to take the information back to their parents and talk about what they had learned in school that day. It became a future dream to write a series of children's books to help