



**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 President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley praise Gallup High's Lady Bengals 5A champions

**GALLUP, N.M.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley and Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James joined parents, coaches, sponsors and fans to honor Gallup High School's Lady Bengals, New Mexico's State 5A Champions, at their awards dinner here Wednesday.



*Members of the Gallup High School Lady Bengals 5A State Championship team proudly display their award Pendleton blankets, their letters, bars, and trophy awarded to them at the King Dragon Restaurant in Gallup Wednesday night. From left to right the team members are Tamara Chee, Jeri Martin, Lachelle Begay, Brooke Spencer, Valerie Kast Renee Dick and Cherelle Rosales. Coach John Lomasney is at the far left and Assistant Coach Rhonda Ray is to the right.*

At the March 11 state title game at the Pit in Albuquerque, the Lady Bengals' 6'6" Valerie Kast blocked the final shot of the tournament to let the Gallup High girls basketball team beat Las Cruces 39-37 before 15,000 totally crazy fans. The win brought the state championship back to Gallup after four years.

To commemorate their successful season, President Shirley also presented a Navajo Nation Plaque of Honor to the team.

"As president of the Navajo Nation, we're

very proud of all of you," Dr. Shirley told the team. "Because you're champions and you're going for excellence, you're a good role model to all the youth of the City of Gallup, the surrounding communities and the Navajo Nation."

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The President also shared praise for Coach John Lomasney and Assistant Coach Rhonda Ray, the Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education and the numerous Gallup businesses that supported and contributed to the team as they traveled to play this season.

He also gave special praise to the parents of the team members.

“That’s the reason they excel and become the state champions,” Dr. Shirley said. “I just revere what you’ve done and what you’ve accomplished. I know that you’re dedicated to excellence, and that’s one of the reasons why you are who you are. It takes teamwork to be champions.”

Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James told the girls they succeeded

because they disciplined themselves and worked for what they achieved.

She encouraged them to thank their parents for the support they never fail to give.

“They’re your backbone,” she said. “They always have a smile on their face for you. Have faith in yourself.”

Assistant Coach Rhonda Ray, who attended college on a four-year basketball scholarship, said returning to Gallup to coach under Coach Lomasney brought her full circle from her beginnings shooting hoops through a bicycle wheel rim her father attached to a pole for her.

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**President Shirley present plaque to Lady Bengals Head Coach John Lomasney at Wednesday’s awards dinner at the King Dragon Restaurant**