



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley praise Navajo police officers for dedication, hard work, fighting DUI

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley praised Navajo police officers for protecting the public against alcohol-impaired drivers at the second annual Navajo Nation Law Enforcement recognition banquet here Friday, May 4.

Eight Navajo Nation police officers were presented with awards in appreciation and recognition for the services and dedication they've shown toward changing the Navajo Nation's attitude and behavior about drunk driving and underage drinking, and for the support they have given to the victims of the violent crimes.

Among those honored were Ofc. Wendell Bitsilley of the Window Rock District, Ofc. Vernon Begay of the Kayenta District, Ofc. Jason White of the Kayenta District, Sgt. Raymond Joe, Ofc. Eddie Halwood and Ofc. Kevin Nakai of the Chinle Police District, Sgt. Clifton Smith of the Dilkon District, and Ofc. Delfred Begay of the Crownpoint District.

"Our Navajo law enforcement officers are our protectors, our lifesavers," the President said. "We will never know how many lives you saved. Tonight we share pollen words. We appreciate you with a small token gift – but remember, pollen words matter most – *ahé'hee*, on behalf of our people."

The President said drunk drivers continue to take lives every day. He said he and his family know the pain associated with losing a loved one to a drunk driver.

"Today we speak and educate from experience," he said, referring to his 29-year-old daughter, Tona-Vee Shirley-Paymella, who, in 2001, tried to avoid a drunk driver by pulling to the side of the road only to have the person collide with her vehicle anyway.

Mrs. Shirley, who serves as chairperson of the Navajo Nation DUI Task Force and Navajo Chapter of MADD, said that with the assistance and resources provided by the national organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Navajo people have been helped through public service announcements and



Members of the Navajo Nation STEP Program honored at the Second Annual Navajo Law Enforcement Recognition Banquet are Ofc. Wendell Bitsilley of the Window Rock District, Ofc. Vernon Begay of the Kayenta District, Ofc. Jason White of the Kayenta District, Sgt. Raymond Joe, Ofc. Eddie Halwood and Ofc. Kevin Nakai of the Chinle Police District, Sgt. Clifton Smith of the Dilkon District, and Ofc. Delfred Begay of the Crownpoint District. Also pictured is Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly, President Joe Shirley and First Lady Vikki Shirley.

a grant from Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano's office for the "Protecting You, Protecting Me" program.

The program was started at the Red Mesa School District. It is designed to have older students teach younger students in grades 1 through 5 about the risks of underage alcohol use, adolescent brain development and vehicle safety skills.

"The program teaches high school students to be the educators and teach the younger kids of the dangers of drunk driving," she said. "So, tonight, we honor eight officers who work very hard to save lives and prevent injuries on a daily basis."



Shown with members of the Navajo Nation DUI Task Force are Ofc. Verna Nez, Ofc. Lorna Benally, Bessie Yellowhair-Simpson, Lt. Francine Bradley, First Lady Vikki Shirley, Ericka Espino, Sgt. Gladys Anton, Ofc. Loretta Redhouse, and President Shirley.

Mrs. Shirley said she and the President wanted to thank the police officers because “we take you away from your family, wife and children.”

She said President Shirley has developed a set of materials called “Path of Hope” which is designed to educate the Navajo Nation and communities. The kit, which will be available later this month, offers a series of brochures, fact sheets, posters and a video that provides information on Navajo Nation victim services.

The President credited Samson Cowboy, the executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, with being able to increase the number of Navajo Nation police officers, acquiring new police vehicles, and obtaining the equipment needed for the Navajo Nation DUI Task Force.

“A lot of equipment and overtime money for staff was made available as I directed him to not abuse our staff but to compensate fairly,” President Shirley said. “Sampson Cowboy makes that happen. Help is still needed for Chinle and Tuba City PD, and it’s coming. We are currently working on the \$30 million for a new detention center here on Navajo.”

Former Navajo Police Sgt. Raymond Joe, who now serves as Navajo Nation Council delegate from Tachee, Blue Gap, Whippoorwill, said the Navajo Police STEP Program has increased the number of traffic citations issued from two-to-three daily to about 400 citations a day.

He said DUI arrests on the Navajo Nation now number about 5,000 each month.

“I’d like to give thanks to the dedication and discipline of the police department,” Sgt. Joe said. “With the help of First Lady Vikki Shirley, we had a lot more success with grants. Since November, I retired and was elected as council delegate and was appointed to the Public Safety Committee.”

He said he appreciated the assistance from President Shirley and Vice President Ben Shelly for the funding for Chinle Police Department, noting that positive changes are already taking place through partnership.

Ericka Espino, the state executive director of MADD Arizona, said MADD honors law enforcement officers because of the work they do to make highways safe.

“We, better than many, understand what you face because we’ve seen it,” she said. “The hours of paperwork the testimony, dealing with angry offenders defending their actions, and, often times, very long work shifts.”

She said that despite that, police officers continue to stay on the front lines to protect communities and make roads safer for everyone.

“You protect families who may never have the chance to thank you,” she said. “You keep the roadways safe for motorists traveling to and from gatherings and celebrations, family dinners and work on a daily basis. And you are the first team at the scene of a crash helping a newly-victimized family to cope with tragic grief and sometimes the loss of a loved one.”

She noted that MADD works to support victims and survivors of drunk driving by offering free support services. Its campaign to eliminate drunk driving focuses on four elements; intensive high-visibility law enforcement, full implementation of current alcohol ignition interlock technologies, exploration of new vehicle-based technology, and gaining public support.

“We at MADD Arizona want to continue a dialogue with community leaders such as President Shirley and First Lady Shirley, Ms. Espino said. “The Navajo Nation is a proud culture which will remain for generations to come.”

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