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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley, honor Navajo police officers for making highways safer from DUI

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Four Navajo Division of Public Safety police officers were honored here Thursday at a Mothers Against Drunk Driving appreciation dinner that recognized their outstanding efforts to clear Navajo highways of drunk drivers.



Officers Isreal Tsosie, Leander Frank, Roderick Whitewater and Carl Whitehorse were applauded for their work and presented with special Carhartt winter NPD jackets by Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley.

Also honored was Terry Huertaz, MADD New Mexico executive director for the past eight years who organized the dinner and this year's MADD executive director of the year.

President Shirley told the 20 officers attending that it is easy for the public to take them for granted, not appreciate the personal sacrifices officers make to keep them safe, and the danger officers place themselves in to do their job.

“Because of you, the way you do your jobs, there will be families who live; grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, children who survive and live,” he said.

The First Lady, who chairs the Navajo Nation DUI Task Force and Navajo Nation MADD Chapter, said that while MADD may sound the warning

Navajo Police Officer Emerson Lilly of Dilkon Police District is one of four officers to receive an award jacket from the President and First Lady during Thursday's MADD Appreciation Dinner.

about drunk driving, it is police officers who do the actual work, dealing with intoxicated drivers to make highways safer to save thousands of lives that may be senselessly lost without them.

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Navajo police officers who are members of the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program are, left to right, Sergeant Byron Coolie, Officers Virginia Lee, LeRoy Wilson, Mark Keams, Carlos Yazzie, Clarence Bahe, DeManuel Yazzie, and Sgt. Raymond Joe.

“A sincere thank you for protecting us on our roads and arresting drunk drivers as well as enforcing seat belt use,” Mrs. Shirley told the officers. “We pray for you and hope you will continue to stand with us as we fight together.”

President Shirley told them that all police officers miss dinners, work double-shifts and take time away from their spouses, children and families just to put themselves on the line for people they may not know in order to make the Navajo Nation a safer, more peaceful place.

“We ought to be a grateful Nation for officers putting your hearts into their work,” the President said. “It’s sad we don’t say thank you as much as we should. It comes from the heart when I say you’ve done a tremendous service to our constituents. Thanks for all you’ve done, all you’re doing and all you will do.”

Assistant U.S. Attorney Sam Winder told the group that he would be unable to do his job to capacity if not for what police officers do.

Rachel O’Conner, New Mexico’s DUI Czar who represented New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, said DUI deaths have declined almost 40 percent since 1984 when some 400 people a year died on New Mexico highways from drunk driving.

MADD’s mission is to stop drunk driving, support victims of this violent crime and to prevent underage drinking.

To volunteer for the Navajo Nation MADD Chapter, called first Lady Vikki Shirley’s office at 928-871-7904.

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New Mexico MADD Executive Director Terry Huertaz is honored for her work with a Navajo rug by Navajo First Lady Vikki Shirley as Miss Navajo Nation Rachelle James, President Shirley and other guests look on.