



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Miss America Jennifer Berry tells students at Ganado to beware of alcohol, make good choices for their life

GANADO, Ariz. – She had never been to the Navajo Nation before.

But that did not stop Miss America 2006 Jennifer Berry from sharing the most basic and important of Navajo teachings with the 1,000 students who had come to see her: that their choices are up to them.

Miss Berry was greeted with thunderous applause as she took the stage at the Ganado Pavilion here Friday.

Her visit to the Navajo Nation was arranged by the Office of Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley, who is the Four Corners spokeswoman for Mother Against Drunk Driving.



Accompanying Miss Berry was the First Lady, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Miss Navajo Nation 2006-2007 Jocelyn Billy.

Miss Berry told the students the story of how she had become the national spokeswoman for the organization Mother Against Drunk Driving. While in high school, she lost a close 16-year-old friend to an alcohol-related auto crash after six students had been drinking for three hours on the Fourth of July.

“It was the first time in Kristen’s life she

Miss America Jennifer Berry was surrounded by students as she left the stage following her talk at the Ganado Pavilion last Friday. Here she becomes part of the Ganado Hornets Cheerleading Squad. The girls performed a high-flying cheer for the audience during Miss America’s visit.

took her first sip of alcohol,” Miss Berry said. “One of my very own friends had died because of a choice. At our school, it changed our lives forever.”

So at age 17, Miss Berry joined her local chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving in her hometown of Tulsa, Okla.

She said that was considered a young age to join such an organization and some wondered what she may have known about drunk driving and the pain it can cause.

"I had experienced the absolute worst," she said. "The loss of someone they love because of a bad choice by someone else."

She said when she began to research the effects of underage drinking and drunk driving online she learned that 18,000 young people were killed by drunk drivers the year Kristen died 18,000 families affected. And another person is killed by a drunk driver every 3 minutes.

"People are killed by a decision, not by a disease," she said. "Drunk driving and alcohol is still the largest killer of youth. It's a very dangerous drug."

She asked the students to raise their hands if they knew what peer pressure was and most did. She said students as young as fourth and fifth graders experience peer pressure today but didn't when she was that age. She said her friend Kristen had fallen victim to peer pressure and was led to make a bad choice.

"I want to challenge you to make choices in your life to take you where you want to go," Miss Berry said. "Never give up on your dream or your goal. Thank you for standing up and saying no to alcohol and no to drugs."

First Lady Vikki Shirley told the students that Miss America promotes a platform of "Building Intolerance to Drunk Driving and Underage Drinking," which is the first of its kind in the history of Miss America.

She said the Navajo Nation DUI Task Force is continuing efforts to make Navajo highways safe and to educate students and the public about the tragedy brought by drunk driving.

"We're doing what we can to fight this crime of drunk driving," the First Lady said.

She had Miss America present eight officers and three sergeants from the Navajo Department of Law Enforcement Selective Traffic Enforcement Program with vests in recognition of their service.



Miss America Jennifer Berry thanks the Navajo police officers for the work they do keeping the highways safe by cracking down on drunk drivers.

They are: Sgt. Raymond Joe, Sgt. Francine Bradley, Sgt. Gladys Antone, Officer Clarence Bahe, Jr., Officer Leroy Wilson, Officer Roland Dash, Officer Mark Keams, Officer Marwin Joe, Officer Loretta Redhouse, Officer Israel Tsosie and Officer Carlos Yazzie.

Mrs. Shirley said the STEP was established in 2004 as a Presidential initiative because of the high incidence of impaired drivers on Navajo Nation highways and the increasing number of crashes.

Since January 2006, the Navajo police have made 1,865 reported DUI arrests. Just this year, there have been 72 motor vehicle fatalities.

The STEP program consists of seven officers and a supervisor from each district. The teams enforce traffic laws such as speeding, seat belt use, and conduct sobriety checkpoints.



President Shirley told the students that he, the First Lady and their family lost a daughter – Tona Vee Paymella-Shirley – to a drunk on Nov. 24, 2001.

“When you get behind the wheel when you’re drinking alcohol, people die. She left children behind. She left a spouse behind,” he said. “I don’t know if anyone ever heals. We continue to hurt. I don’t know how long we’ll continue to hurt.”

Like Mrs. Shirley, who is the spokesperson for Mothers Against Drunk Driving on the Navajo Nation, Miss Berry has dedicated her reign as Miss America to being the national spokesperson for the national MADD organization after losing a high school friend in an alcohol-related auto accident.

“The death of my friend has made a lasting mark on my life,” she said. “It was the first funeral I ever attended and that experience sparked a need to do something to help save other lives. I hope to be able to use my title as Miss America to make a lasting mark for the better.”

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., presents Miss America with a Navajo rug and also a Pendleton robe with the seal of the Navajo Nation as gifts. He said he hopes she remembers her visit to the Navajo Nation and thanked her for her message to the future of the Navajo people, their students.