

Contact: Karen Francis, Public Information Officer
Navajo Nation Council Office of the Speaker
(928) 871-7160
karenfrancis@navajo.org
www.navajonationcouncil.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: Monday, June 19, 2006

MARIANO LAKE CELEBRATES SIGNING OF TREATY OF 1868

On June 16, 2006, hundreds of people joined the community of Mariano Lake as it celebrated the signing of the Treaty of 1868 which ended the conflict between the Navajo people and the United States government and returned the Navajo people back to their sacred homeland from Bosque Redondo.

In what was described as an historic occasion, a proclamation issued by Bureau of Indian Affairs Eastern Navajo Agency Supervisor Duane Birdbear to the Mariano Lake community reaffirming the importance of the Treaty of 1868 was delivered via “Indian Pony Express” from Crownpoint, New Mexico. The riders, led by Council delegate Young Jeff Tom, were cheered on as they arrived at the Chapter house where Tom delivered the proclamation to Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan to read aloud to the community.

The proclamation acknowledges that the “Navajo Nation exercises its undiminished sovereign authority on behalf of the Nation and the Nation’s members in a prudent manner, takes all necessary action to protect the health and safety of its members and visitors, and has worked in a cooperative manner with the surrounding government” and that the “Navajo Nation and Mariano Lake Chapter have sent their sons and daughters to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States in times of conflict, many of whom have served honorably and valiantly in service to their country.”

The Pony Express team also included Alvin Smith, Benny Enrico, Ray Cleveland, Harrison Mariano and Angela Yazzie, a student-athlete at Thoreau High School.

During earlier remarks, the speaker noted that before the signing of the Treaty of 1868, the Navajo people had a system of governance guided by fundamental laws and that the Navajo Nation Council attempted to preserve those laws through legislation, specifically with the enactment of the Dine Fundamental Law in 2002.

Mistress of ceremony Bess Tsosie emphasized the importance of education and preserving cultural teachings in commemorating the Treaty of 1868. She noted that sacred songs and ceremonies were performed for the Navajo people to return home which resulted in the signing of the Treaty with education as one of the bargaining items.

“Our leaders asked for education for you,” Tsosie said. “I want everybody to remember that and put our children in school everyday.”

Tsosie further remarked that children can learn English at school and learn Navajo at home. She said that teaching the Navajo language is the key to preserving the Navajo way of life.

“The Treaty of 1868 celebration reminds the federal government of the obligation they have to the Navajo people,” she said. “It also reminds the Diné that we will always have our lands and our culture, provided we practice it daily and teach it to our children.”

Many people raised their hands when asked by President Joe Shirley if they had read the Treaty of 1868. To those who hadn’t, he encouraged them to look it up on the Internet and become aware of its contents.

The acknowledgment of Treaty Day began three years ago with Bronco Martinez and other community members organizing the first celebration. Martinez is now Chapter President.

In holding the event, Chapter Secretary Tsosie said that they were trying to promote participation in their local government.

“Most chapters conduct only serious businesses,” Tsosie said. “We are trying to get our people, especially our elders, to come to the Chapter to enjoy each other’s company - to basically make the people enjoy themselves. This is to serve as a motivation to have the people come to chapter meetings and plan other activities.”

In addition to hearing from various speakers, the celebration also included a health walk/run, a traditional song and dance, live country and rock music, exhibits, concessions and Chi’zhi Rodeo.

###

Attached photo: The Indian Pony Express arrives.

