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Navajo elders and school children receive free eye exams, eyeglasses

KAYENTA, Ariz.—Navajo Nation First Lady Martha Shelly recently launched an initiative to provide eye examinations for elders and children in Kayenta.

The One Sight Project brought a mobile eye lab to provide eye exams, screenings, and eyeglasses courtesy of Walking Shield, Inc.

Serving families since 1986, Walking Shield has followed the mission of improving the quality of life for American Indian families by coordinating programs that provide shelter, healthcare, community development support, educational assistance, and humanitarian said.

Phil Stevens, a Lakota Sioux, founded Walking Shield, Inc. to improve the quality of life for American Indians. Walking Shield is his Lakota name.

From May 12 to 16, Navajo elders and children received eye exams and eyeglasses free of charge after signing up for the services months in advance.

First Lady Shelly said, "The One Sight Project is unique because they do eye screenings, eye exams and produce eyeglasses on site through their mobile lab."

A total of 157 Navajo elders from Kayenta and the surrounding communities received services and 99 percent received eyeglasses.

In addition, 800 school kids received free eye exams and glasses. The students were from Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta, Pinon, Rough Rock, and Shonto schools.

During the awards dinner on May 15, First Lady Shelly said the need for eye exams existed throughout the Navajo Nation because not all children and their families had the necessary insurance for examinations.

"In 2010, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System reduced the cost for children's healthcare, especially in the area of eye exams and dental care," she said. "In addition, we have parents and grandparents that are not working and cannot afford healthcare.

"This project is addressing those needs," she added.

For day one, the doctors served 150 elders from the Kayenta Senior Citizens Center. School kids were bussed in for the next three days to undergo exams for glasses.

In addition to the examinations for prescriptions, the professionals from Walking Shield checked for eye diseases and other vision conditions.

The Navajo Nation First Lady's Office continues their mission of providing public outreach to the elders and children across the Nation.

"Thank you to Walking Shield for providing these desperately needed services. You have not only enriched the lives of all who participated, but opened up their view of the world," First Lady Shelly said.

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President Shelly undergoes one of the final testing areas before receiving his eye prescription for eyeglasses. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

The reception area for the eye exams was busy. Elders filled out applications before going through 10 exam areas for glasses. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

President Shelly and First Lady Martha Shelly went through the entire eye exam process with other Navajo elders. (Photo by Rick Abasta)