Vice President Nez attends Birdsprings Memorial Day event
Begaye was in Washington, D.C., and that he sent a message of gratitude and respect to honor the fallen warriors on Memorial Day.

Navajo veterans are one of the four pillars of the administration and plans include appointing a veteran within the Office of the President and Vice President to work solely on veteran issues.

“We know that you need a veteran in our office. They know what you’ve been through and what you’re facing on a daily basis. We’re going to put a good person in there who knows the veteran issues,” Vice President Nez said.

Melvin Nez, adjunct for Post 112 of the American Legion in Leupp, praised the Birdsprings event in memory and honor of those who died in battle.

“It’s really humbling to experience where the chapter veterans organizations are taking the lead,” Nez said.

He noted that previously, it was the American Legion that coordinated events such as the Memorial Day recognition of veterans lost in battle.

He asked for two minutes of silence in honor of veterans in the area that lost their lives in service to the U.S. Armed Forces. He then read their names to the audience.

Alvin Begay, John C. Begay, Stephen K. Begay, Delfred B. Bitsuie, Joseph H. Curley, Ben Joe, Leon Jones, Riley Jones, David Kelly Sr., Michael Lee, Jack D. Nelson, John Redsteer, R. Riggs, Arliss Sloan, Yoland Tom Swift, Elwood Thompson, Virgil H. Todakoozie, Murphy Tsosie, Austin Williams, Lesley Williams and Alex Williams Sr. were all honored.

They were from different branches of service and died fighting in the battles of World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam War, and Desert Storm.

The Birdsprings church choir performed “Amazing Grace” in Navajo and English to honor the fallen veterans.

Families that brought the flags of loved ones who died in battle participated in the flag folding ceremony with the honor guard from Birdsprings and Tolani Lake.

The veterans unfolded the flags, shook them out, inspected them and refolded the flags before presenting them back to the families. Nez read the 13 folds of the American flag to the audience, detailing the significance behind each fold.

The flags were refolded for veterans killed in action from the local communities: Tony Kenneth Begay, John W. Redsteer, Murphy Tsosie, Joe K. Wagner, Fred Chee, Billy Thompson, Nathan Curtis and Robert Williams.

The American and Navajo flags were also refolded for Loren Whitehat Sr., a Navajo Police officer killed in the line of duty.

At the conclusion of the flag folding ceremony, the honor guard stepped outside the chapter house to perform a 21-gun salute for those who died in combat.

Other dignitaries in attendance included Sen. Carlyle Begay and Navajo County Supervisor Jesse Thompson.

Vice President Nez was well received by the residents of Birdsprings Chapter, many of which said it was the first time in a long time that a Navajo leader came to break bread with them and take time from their busy schedule to honor the fallen Navajo veterans. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

Current and former veterans lined the southern wall of the chapter house to be honored by the audience. The people in attendance were invited to meet the veterans and shake hands with them to personally thank them for their service to their country. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

Two groups of honor guard members unfolded the American flags of veterans killed in combat, shook them out, inspected them for tears or frays, and then refolded them before presenting the flag back to family members. Upon return to the families, they saluted the flag before executing an about face. (Photo by Rick Abasta)