Office of Navajo Nation First Lady foundation to promote health, domestic violence prevention, economic strength

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Office of the Navajo Nation First Lady has announced the creation of a foundation to promote good health, domestic violence prevention and economic capacity-building for women.

The Navajo Nation First Lady’s Foundation, Inc., hopes to raise funds to help empower Navajos to solve their social, economic and environmental problems through community-directed projects that build local capacity.

“Since I re-established the Office of the First Lady in 2003, I’ve wanted to find a way to help fund empowerment projects for Diné,” said Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley. “The new foundation will provide us with a way to bring money from the private sector into the Navajo Nation so that we can fund worthwhile projects that empower Dine families.”

The foundation plans to work with existing social service agencies and Navajo chapters to identify women who are victims of domestic violence, teenage or single mothers or other women who are seeking to build their work force skills.

“The foundation is something that we want to use to help bring in more funds to the Navajo Nation to do some of the projects that we’re working on like domestic violence, the gardening program, focusing on diabetes, and then trying to get education out there about diabetes and one of the first projects we want to do is on gardening, getting small gardens started and working in partnership with the communities at the chapters,” Mrs. Shirley said.

It calls for raising funds for underserved communities with a special area of emphasis to empower Navajo women to provide for themselves and their families.

The foundation has three primary focus areas:

- Navajo women education and career advancement.
- Navajo health promotion through healthful food production; and
- Domestic violence prevention and economic capacity building for Navajo women.

The three focus areas will be implemented through a community gardens program that teaches gardening and provides healthful food production education for Navajo to
reduce diabetes; a mentoring program for college-bound Navajo women, and a violence prevention and economic empowerment program for disadvantaged Navajo women.

The first response the foundation received was an in-kind $10,000 grant from Certiport, a Utah computer training company. The grant will be used to provide computer literacy training and certification for 100 Navajo women.

“Certiport came and approached me and said that they would be willing to work with us. We also had another grant that came in from Earth Walk where they gave us some computers,” Mrs. Shirley said. “Everything just fell into place where we have laptops and then we also have the certification. So that some of the things we’re hoping to do through the Foundation.”

The computer literacy program is designed to assist women who are domestic violence victims. Women seeking to leave a domestic abuse situation may be unable to do so because they lack adequate job skills. In the majority of cases in which domestic violence occurs, the family is also living in poverty, which adds to family stress.

The computer literacy course is designed to allow participants to work at their own pace, Mrs. Shirley said.

“We felt that providing this free computer training would be a powerful way to help women take care of themselves and their families, since three-fourths of jobs require computer skills,” she said.

Anyone interested in receiving training should contact the Office of the First Lady at 928-871-7919.

The foundation is now seeking funding to begin creating organic gardens at chapters beginning in next spring. It is hoped the gardens can help to address the problem of rising diabetes rates within the Nation, which is four times the national average. Chapter gardens would engage Dine’ youth to learn gardening skills, provide healthful food for senior centers and teach healthful eating to elders, Mrs. Shirley said.

“While we have programs designed to manage diabetes and provide care, we also need to work on disease prevention by ensuring that those who have diabetes can get the best food possible to keep them healthy,” she said.

The goal is to start gardens at five or more chapters each year. Participating chapters would receive fencing, an irrigation system, seeds, training and educational materials on diabetes prevention and healthy diets, she said.

“The Navajo Nation is the largest tribal nation in the United States and is a proud nation with many creative and gifted people,” Mrs. Shirley said. “Our foundation will work to gather that talent and energy together to make a brighter future for Diné.”

The foundation is incorporated in the state of Arizona and has applied to the Internal Revenue Service for recognition as a tax-exempt organization.

To obtain a brochure, donate or inquire about a project, please contact the Office of the First Lady at 928-871-7919.

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