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## **Cultural Training to Teach Arizonian Law Enforcement Officers About Cultural Interaction with Navajo Citizens to take Place in May**

**ST. MICHAELS, NAVAJO NATION** — Law enforcement officers not familiar with the cultural and societal values of Navajos are invited to attend a Navajo Cultural Training on May 29th and 30th, 2014 in Flagstaff, Arizona.

The training will make clear to the law enforcement officers on what to expect and will give advice on maintaining a good interpersonal communication with Navajo subjects, with whom the officers will encounter in the line of duty.

“We’ve heard some officers say they started to conduct themselves as if they were a Navajo when they encountered a situation that involved a fatality,” said Rodney L. Tahe, policy analyst with the Office of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission. “The training is an important tool to understand the cultural boundaries that inherently exist between Navajos and non-Navajos.”

The four hour training over the two-day period shows law enforcement officers what it’s like to live Navajo in terms of what the core spiritual beliefs are, the geographical and political boundaries, the census reports on Navajo communities, including those located near border towns like Flagstaff and Winslow, Arizona and Farmington and Gallup, New Mexico.

In addition, the training introduces law enforcement officers to the cultural differences that set apart Navajos from other American Indians, and non-indigenous peoples. This includes the definition and use of certain sacred items and objects, what it means to a Navajo’s spiritual sense of self, the difference between freedom and responsibility of speech, and what the Navajo family unit is, including the clan system.

The catalyst to start the Navajo Cultural Training happened several years ago when a Flagstaff police officer found a Navajo man staggering along the road. The officer concluded the subject was inebriated and conducted a search of the Navajo man. During the search, the officer found a medicine bundle and opened it to only dump its contents on the ground without knowing the importance and sacredness of that bundle, or what was inside the bundle.

This incident would have gone unnoticed if it weren’t shared by the Native Americans for Community Action, Inc. in Flagstaff prior to the signed Memorandum of Understanding

between the Navajo Nation and City of Flagstaff on March 27, 2012, by former Flagstaff Mayor Sara Presler. One of the goals of the memorandum is to expand and promote cultural awareness for the law enforcement officers.

The memorandum, approved in March 2012, pointed out that Northern Arizona University has one of the highest Native American student enrollments, and that their presence, and many other Native Americans living in and around the community maintain an integral role in creating and shaping the city. The memorandum encourages city leaders and community members of Flagstaff to become conscious of the history, heritage, and contributions American Indians bring to the city.

The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission has partnered with Native Americans for Community Action, Inc. in providing the Navajo Culture Training to all active law enforcement officers in Arizona.

The presenters of the training are: **Frank Bradley III**, Sergeant (Ret.), a Navajo Nation Human Rights Commissioner who is certified by the by the Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board; **Dorothy Denetsoie Gishie**, a Social Service Administrator, for Native Americans for Community Action, Inc.; and **Rose Toehe**, M.ED., Workforce Investment Act Director for Native Americans for Community Action, Inc.

During previous training the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission and Native Americans for Community Action, Inc. realized that newly hired or transferred law enforcement officers with the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, Flagstaff Police Department and Northern Arizona University Police Department were from other locations outside the area, and those officers had never had previous interaction with American Indians.

Flagstaff City Manager Kevin Burke attended the Tuesday, April 1st training session and expressed his appreciation with Mayor Jerry Nabours.

“Commissioner Frank Bradley did an outstanding job of teaching our officers about the various aspects of Navajo culture and heritage,” Nabours said. “His experience as a law enforcement officer helped break down barriers giving him instant credibility with his audience. This information will help our officers provide a high level of customer service to all our citizens, and especially those who are members of the Navajo Nation.”

There have been a total of 8 training sessions of the “Navajo Culture for Law Enforcement Officers,” which included the attendance and participation of the Flagstaff and Winslow Chief of Police, in the past year, with the next training scheduled for Thursday, May 29 and Friday, 30, 2014. The next training session is open to all active law enforcement officers in state of Arizona and is credited four continuing hours.

“The Flagstaff Police Department is grateful to work closely with the Navajo Human Rights Commission and members of Native Americans for Community Action in the development of Navajo Cultural Training presented to all members of the Flagstaff Police Department,” said Chief of Police Treadway. “We hold these training in high esteem, and

it has afforded our staff an opportunity to be exposed to many facets of the Navajo culture and traditions. I believe this exposure has led to a better understanding and appreciation of traditional Navajo values, and I am certain this training will translate to better service and opportunities to provide a better understanding and more compassion when serving our community.”

For more information about the next Navajo Cultural Training contact the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission at 928-871-7436.

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