



## THE NAVAJO NATION

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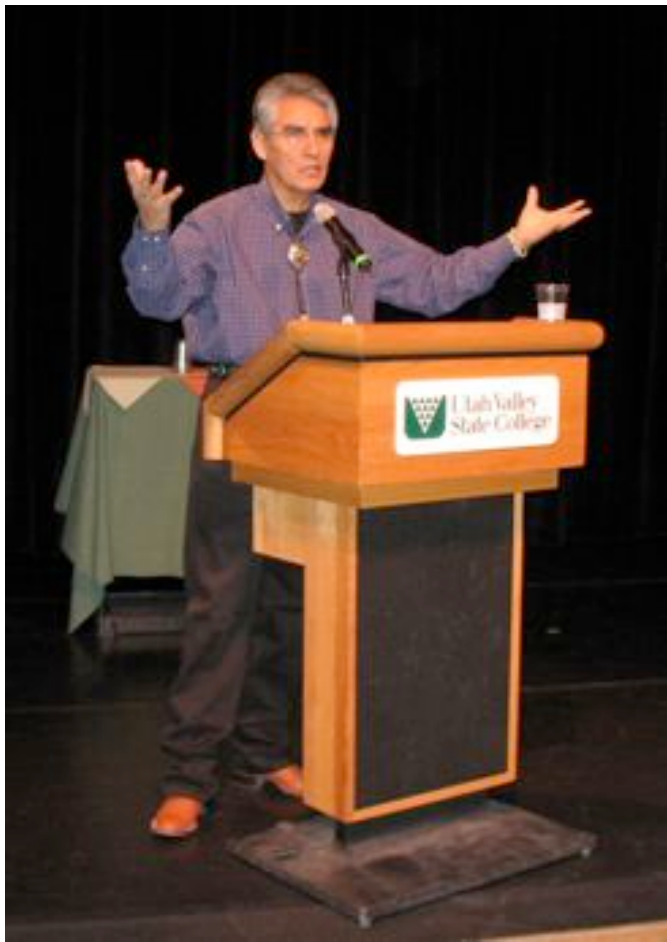
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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., addresses world conference on value of working together, regaining sacred Diné teachings

**OREM, Utah** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., told participants of the international “Women of the Mountains” conference here Thursday that although the world is leaving behind valuable teachings that have sustained people, success can be obtained by realizing “we’re all on the same side.”



*Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., speaks to participants of the international “Women of the Mountains” conference at Utah Valley State College. He said people are ultimately all on the same side and should work together.*

“We’re all members of the five-fingered, intelligent earth dwellers call homo sapiens, human beings,” he said on the campus of Utah Valley State College. “We’re all family. Let’s see what we can do to compliment each other. Let’s see what we can do to help each other. Let’s team up. Let’s work together, not against. Let’s get at the real culprits – the famine, the poverty that’s out there, the greed, the jealousy, the bigotry, the racism, all manner of diseases. I think we have a chance.”

UVSC and the Kyrgyz National Center for Development of Mountain Regions hosted the conference March 7-10 to address issues facing women in mountainous world regions.

“The purpose of the conference is to examine issues critical to women and children in developing mountain nations,” said Rusty Butler, UVSC associate vice president of international affairs and co-organizer for the conference. “Conditions in these regions often provide a breeding ground for ills that disproportionately impact women and their offspring.”

Sharing the stage with President Shirley was Utah Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert. El Salvador Vice President Ana Vilma de Escobar sent a videotaped presentation. Elena Bonner, widow of Nobel Peace Laureate Andrei Sakharov, spoke via telephone. Also attending was former Utah Governor Olene Walker and former Montana Governor Judy Martz.

President Shirley told participants that he was raised by his grandmother who instilled in him the teachings that led him to his 39-year career in public service. He said those teachings were to strive to become independent, pray at dawn with white ground corn, and to run to maintain good health.

These days, however, he fears that these teachings are being lost among Navajos and the world – and with them values to protect the home, women and children.

He said there has been an unfortunate rise in domestic violence and child abuse across Navajoland in recent years.

"It makes me wonder if that's the reason why we have the abuse that is out there today," he said. "Children and grandchildren not relating to grandparents, and grandparents not relating to grandchildren."

He said that in Navajo culture, the woman and mother was the center of the home. He said these values are "very honorable, very holy and very sacred."

"The role of women in my culture was that the woman was the home – the Beauty Way, the Blessingway," he said. "The role of women was the home, the heart, the hearth of a home, and the men's responsibility was the protector, the provider. His role was beyond the door. You get out there and you hunt. You wrestle with the monsters to protect the home, to protect the woman, the wife, the children, the possessions."



*Michelle Scott, VP for People Development at Certiport, explains the success of the Skilled2Succeed program among Navajo students to UVSC President William Sederburg, Utah Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert and Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.*

"We had no idea our seeds would go all the way to the Navajo Nation. It has just been a honor to serve."

She said the program now has graduated 135 Utah single mothers.

"They are all working today and most are making more than \$15 an hour, so they have moved out of poverty," she said.

Now, the first Navajo student to complete the program is Chris Benally of Coppermine, Ariz. He said he was a construction worker but wanted to find other employment so he would not have to continually travel the country looking for physical work.

"I want to go back to the Navajoland for the summer internship to help the people that come from a less fortunate place," he said. "I kind of came from there."

"One person can make a significant difference," Lt. Gov. Herbert said. "I have had reinforced to me that one person, and how you influence others, by persuasion, by reason, by motivation, by inspiration, one person can make a difference and change the course of history, and maybe the course of humanity."

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*Michelle Scott, President Shirley and Chris Benally, the first Navajo graduate of Skilled2Succeed*

Following the presentations, UVSC President William A. Sederburg led a discussion about an innovative computer training education program that has been expanded for Navajo students called "Skilled2Succeed."

The program allows participants, most of whom are single mothers, to achieve employment and self-sufficiency by acquiring certification in critical job skills.

Certiport Vice President for People Development Michelle Scott said that two years ago she asked UVSC President Sederburg if she could come to the campus to plant a tree.

"Our first 12 ladies went through the Skilled3Succeed computer training program. We planted a seed," she said.