

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Diné College Speaker Talks Economics, Identity

Event Includes 50th Anniversary Recognition, Art Exhibit

TSAILE, Ariz. — There are misunderstandings about Native Americans when it comes to economics, a speaker said at a recent Diné College 50th anniversary commemorative event.

The biggest misperception is that a private sector economy never hit Native America — and that is something that couldn't be more untrue, particularly when one looks at the business workings of families across the Navajo Nation over the years.

"One big question out there is what are the things that we do to drive our economies," Robert Miller, a law professor at the University of Arizona and the keynote speaker at Diné College's April 13 *Appreciation Day* — scheduled as part of the College's effort to promote its 50th anniversary. "The thing is, we've (Native Americans) had (individual) sustainable economies for a long time. It's our proximity to border towns that might be a detriment. We spend a lot at the border towns."

Miller is a professor at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at the University of Arizona, the Chief Justice of the Confederate Tribes of the Grand Ronde in Oregon and a citizen of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma. The Portland, Ore., native is the author of *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Manifest Destiny*.

He told a Ned Hatathli Museum audience that consisted of Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation Council Delegates Leonard Tsosie and Nelson BeGaye and Diné College President Monty Roessel, that about 94 cents of every dollar spent by Navajos goes to border towns like Gallup or Flagstaff. BeGaye is a member of the Diné College board of Regents.

Miller said Navajos do everything they can to sustain and improve the private sector economy around the Navajo Nation — where a large number of families earn a living in animal husbandry and farming. Even though most Native Americans, generally, live below the national poverty line, there exists a strong history of ranching and farming

which remain the backbone of Native economies.

"It's not anti-cultural to be involved in private business," Miller told the couple of dozen audience members at the four-hour event. "Keeping dollars on the Navajo Nation definitely has a multiplying effect," Miller said, suggesting the opposite is not tantamount to "sovereign immunity." Miller likened money leaving the reservation to border towns as "contaminated leakage," noting reservations everywhere have their share of investments, i.e., restaurants, gas stations and convenience stores and hotels.

NN Vice President Jonathan Nez

Nez, a former Diné College student, praised Diné College for keeping alive traditional teachings and Navajo lore. "We still have a yearning for Navajo life and culture and teachings and that is what Diné College is all about. The modern monsters of our people are drug addiction, domestic violence, suicide and diabetes. We have to get back to the things we learned from the past. That's who we are."

Besides Miller and Nez, a former Diné College student, spoke mostly about Navajo identity and the upcoming 150th anniversary of the Navajo Long Walk. That walk went from the Navajo reservation to Fort Sumner, N.M. The College has erected a 25-piece commemorative art exhibit of the College from over the years. The exhibit is open throughout 2018.

Another *Appreciation Day* takes place May 23 at the Shiprock campus. There are others scheduled through September at the Crownpoint, Chinle, Tuba City and Window Rock campuses.