

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Eugene Charley: ‘...Diné College is the Pioneer’ of Native Education
Career Educator Proud of Alma Mater

TSAILE, ARIZ. — When it comes to education, giving back to the community is just as important as acquiring formal education itself. And, in some cases, the giving can get down right overwhelming — but it’s worth it.

That was the theme of a 60-minute lecture given May 3 by Eugene Charley, a 1970 alumnus of Navajo Community College. The appearance was part of Diné College’s 2018 Speaker Series that commemorates the school’s 50th anniversary. A gala and a golf fundraising tournament are also planned in concert with the anniversary.

A Kayenta, Ariz., native, Charley, 75, was a member of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association, participating as a bullrider. He served as the rodeo association’s club president and team captain for the NCC rodeo team in 1969.

Note: The College changed its name in the 1990s during the tenure of president Tommy Lewis, Ed.D., who was on-hand at the Charley lecture, too.

“A lot of (Native Americans) across the country started going to college because of what Diné College did,” Charley told the dozen or so people gathered for the talk at the Ned Hatathli Building Lecture Hall. “Among Native Americans, Diné College is the pioneer of what it means to go to college.”

Charley referenced Diné College’s 1968 beginning in Many Farms, Ariz., and said education is the key to success no matter what someone’s profession. The career educator occasionally works as a substitute teacher throughout Navajo Nation schools. Saying he strongly advocates Navajo Nation educational curriculum and standards, Charley said the tribe’s school board must continue to play a dominant role in Navajo education.

“The founding fathers stressed Navajo language and culture as a requirement to graduate from Diné College,” Charley said. “Parents have to get involved in the kids’ education. That’s part of the success. The future is right now. Let’s take advantage of it.”

Charley was instrumental in forming the Wrangler Rodeo Club and assisted in the formation of the National Indian Rodeo Association at the College. He received an undergraduate degree from Northern Arizona University in and a master’s degree in education administration from the University of New Mexico.

“Graduating from Diné College gave me the opportunity to educate young Navajo children and work with parents,” Charley said. “There were two people who graduated when I graduated. Now, you have 186 graduating next week. That is a remarkable accomplishment,” Charley commented.

Charley’s message struck a chord with Peter Nez of Denver, Colo. Nez is a graduate of Diné College and was in the area visiting family in Seba Dalkai, Ariz., Nez’s hometown. Nez works as a project manager with National Jewish Health in Denver. Nez and Charley exchanged pleasantries about the high number of cowboys from Seba Dalkai.

“It’s just so nice to see one of our own who is successful and who is encouraging others to succeed,” Nez said. “Sir, I applaud you.”

Charley was one of the first graduates of NCC, having enrolled at the upstart institution in 1969. He congratulated the Diné College *Class of 2018*, saying the College definitely has come a long way in educating Navajos.