



CHAD PATTESON/Emerald

Beth Newberry speaks to community members during a candlelight vigil in the Eugene park-blocks Monday. Organizers held the event to raise awareness of the plight of Navajo Indians on the Big Mountain Reserve.

Vigil held to show support for Navajo

■ **SOLIDARITY:** Some Navajo residents of the Big Mountain area refuse to leave homes

By Eric Collins
Community Reporter

Although the history behind the relocation of Navajo Indians in northeastern Arizona is complex, the significance of a candlelight vigil Monday night was simple: the well-being of the resisting Navajo people.

About 35 local residents and members of the Big Mountain/Native American Support Group gathered at the Eugene park-blocks near the Lane County Courthouse to pray on behalf of Navajo Indians who faced a deadline Monday night to sign an accommodation agreement or be governmentally forced to move.

The Navajo are being told to leave over a 20-year-old dispute over a joint-use area traditionally shared by the Hopi and the Navajo.

However, Beth Newberry, a member of the local affiliation of the Native American support

group, believes there should be protection of the Navajo's burial grounds, way of life and religion.

"What we are talking about is a loss of a way of life here," Beth Newberry, a member of the local affiliation of the Native American support group said. "We want to make the government know the public doesn't support the forced eviction, genocide or ecocide."

Newberry said Monday's vigil was a part of the International Day of Spiritual Solidarity, with groups throughout the world marking the occasion.

On this night, supporters of the cause prayed and sang for the Navajo people, but many people within the support group have taken a hands-on approach to the problem by forming food and clothing drives for the use by the Native Americans.

Many supporters have provided food, blankets and moral support for the Native American families refusing to move off the reservation site.

One UO Survival Center member, Michael Turaski, took part in a food and clothing drive in May

of 1996, bringing pounds of food and raw wool to the Navajo people. Although the support group was able to give the donation, Turaski said Hopi Rangers enforced a strict policy of allowing no citizens on the disputed reservation land. "That was one of the worst things about the trip because we couldn't talk to the people," Turaski said.

Kevin Treacy, a member of the Big Mountain/Native American Support Group in Eugene, said he believed the majority of Indians maintaining residence on the disputed land of the reservation are the elder members of the tribe. "All [the elder Navajo people] know is they've been told to get off the land," Treacy said. "The Navajo believe if they leave the land, the Navajo nation will die."

Stein said the Native American support group will be observing an International Day of Mourning today at noon near the Lane County Courthouse at 8th Avenue and Oak Street with a press conference and subsequent rally and march.

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