

NATIVE NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

Navajo Nation Child Advocacy Program Wins High Honors from Harvard

Proud people who take care of their own, sometimes step on toes.

By Brent Merrill

ST. PAUL, MN. — One of the Tribal programs receiving high honors from the Harvard "Honoring Nations" awards was the Navajo Nation's Child Special Advocacy program. The program is a division of the Navajo Nation's Social Services division.

The program was established in 1990 as a way to respond to high rates of child abuse and neglect on the reservation. The emphasis of the program is to provide traditional Navajo and Western culture therapy to children who have been molested between the ages of 3 and 17.

The child advocacy program has five offices on the reservation and administers diagnosis, treatment and traditional healing as well as sand play therapy, art therapy and forensic interviews. This is all done in an effort to create a safe environment, which pays special attention to the needs of children and their families' emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well being.

According to administrators Mary Huyser and Mary Tsosie, they have to step on people's toes once in a while in order to get what they need for "their" children.

"Yes. Sometimes I have to stomp... I mean step on the toes of some people, including Tribal Council, just

to get what we need for the children," said Huyser during her presentation before the Harvard Honors' panel of judges. "But, we usually get what the children need. We're not afraid. We'll do whatever it takes."

Huyser said the philosophy of the program is simple — it's about doing what is best for the Tribe's children.

"All children of the Navajo Nation are entitled to a safe, healthy and loving environment which nurtures and protects their mental, physical and spiritual well-being. It is the responsibility of existing programs to respond to the children's need for protection, which they cannot provide for themselves. Navajo families must be preserved to improve, build and maintain a balanced harmony to ensure a healthy future," said Huyser of the program's philosophy.

Huyser shared the problems her staff faces daily on the reservation with the Harvard judges.

"The Navajo Nation is a place where women are being beaten," said Huyser. "Where children are abandoned and where children are sexually abused. Where incarcerated women are warehoused. We lock our doors. Where men walk alone, under the desert sun, feeling hungry, thirsty and addicted. The general symptoms



Photo by Brent Merrill

Navajo Nation Child Advocates Mary Huyser (left) and Mary Tsosie give their program's presentation to the Harvard University's "Honoring Nations" award committee at the NCAI conference in St. Paul, Minnesota. Huyser and Tsosie fight for Indian children's rights and were rewarded with high honors for their efforts.

of Navajo families with children who have been sexually abused are that of intergenerational sex abuse, alcoholism, personality disorders, domestic violence, parents who have had multiple sex partners, poverty and children who are neglected.

"When Navajo Child Special Advocacy program staff dream of a more civil society, we dream of a time where every child will not be harmed. Today we provide safety, a belief in children that they can thrive even though sexual abuse has been afflicted upon them," continued Huyser. "We connect. We cannot do the job alone. The disparity can be too much. We connect with pro-

grams and people. We connect with policies and communities. We connect with our culture and justice. We connect with Navajo Criminal Investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Child Protective Services, Office of Prosecutions and Indian Health Service Physicians."

With people like Mary Huyser and Mary Tsosie on the side of children at the Navajo Nation, things should improve and at the same time serve as an example for all other Tribal communities looking to tackle this often-neglected issue.

Children are the future; let's take care of them — no matter whose toes we step on.

San Diego State University to Keep Aztec Name, Consider Changing Logo

SAN DIEGO, CA. (AP) — San Diego State University will keep the Aztec mascot but consider replacing the logo of a red-faced, glaring Indian with a more accurate image, the school's president announced recently.

President Stephen Weber's decision caps a controversy over the university's 76-year-old Aztec tradition, which American Indian and Latino student groups charged is racist and offensive.

Weber said he consulted with students, faculty, and alumni, as well as local American Indian leaders and experts on Aztec history before concluding that use of the Aztec name is a celebration of the ancient culture, not an offense.

"SDSU's invocation of Aztec culture is based on the belief that the Aztec civilization exemplifies admirable qualities," he said. The school "will proudly continue its affiliation with the Aztec culture and traditions as embodiments of strength, valor

and intellectual achievement."

Weber called for a task force of student, alumni and faculty representatives to study Aztec history and consider whether to change the school's logo and the human portrayal of "Monty Montezuma" — based upon the Aztec leader who ruled in the early 1500s.

The group is to present its recommendations by May 1, 2001.

Meanwhile, the student mascot will continue to appear at sporting events, though Weber acknowledged, "it is difficult to argue that our current bare-chested, spear-throwing Monty Montezuma accurately depicts the Aztec leader."

Weber said Miguel Leon Portilla, a Mexican scholar whom he called "the world's leading expert on Aztec culture," found nothing racist or inappropriate in use of the nickname. The portrayal of Monty Montezuma, however, could be "risky" since it opens the possibility of "inappropriate behavior," Weber said.

It is wrong to use a human historical figure as a mascot. Though a vote last month showed strong support for the Aztec name, Quimiro said most SDSU students are unfamiliar with the Indian culture. "A lot of this comes out of ignorance."

~ Christina Quimiro, of the Chicano group MEChA

Scholars contend the real Montezuma wore finely woven royal garments more like Roman tunics than a loincloth or the glittering, colorful outfit worn by SDSU's student mascot.

Chicano and American Indian students opposed to use of the Aztec name shook their heads with disappointment as Weber spoke to reporters.

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rance," she said.

Manuel Lieras, President of the American Indian student group that brought the issue to the student council in September, said convening a task force to create a new, less offensive logo would not solve the problem.

"As long as it's a human representation of Monty Montezuma the struggle will continue," he said.

The university adopted the Aztec mascot in 1925 to reflect the "courage and fighting spirit" of the Mesoamerican Tribe, according to a student newspaper account.

In 1941, a student introduced the "Monty" character by emerging from a teepee at a homecoming game.