

# COMMUNITY UPDATE

Nihitahgo Adahooniitigii Baahane'

## DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

December 2025

Nîch'itsoh

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Nił béé hoziníshii...

### Did You Know...

**The Navajo Ye'i Bi Chei Dance**, is part of a spiritual ceremony, typically performed during the winter months after the first frost, to heal an individual and restore harmony. The entire event is known as the Na'akai, which signifies "walking with the holy people".

Dancers: Masked dancers, traditionally twelve in number, impersonate the Yei (Holy People). There is a head dancer, known as the "speaker of peace," who organizes the group.

T'aán náhah bikeh ndahoo'aah

### Events:

#### January: Yasnilt'ees - The Thawing of Snow

January 1: New Year's Day

January 19: Martin Luther King Day

#### February: Atsá Biyázh - Eaglets Hatching

February 1: Groundhog Day, Wear Red Day (Womens' Heart Awareness)

February 8: Super Bowl Sunday

February 14: Valentine's Day

February 16: Presidents' Day

## Ramah Navajo Chapter House Renovation and Reopening



Picture from Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1W4wPZyW1/>

RAMAH, N.M. — On December 23, the Ramah Navajo Chapter held a reopening and dedication of the Ramah Navajo Chapter House following the completion of a renovation and addition project in Ramah, New Mexico.

The event was attended by chapter staff, chapter leadership, community members, and regional and state representatives. The chapter house serves as a central facility for chapter meetings, administrative functions, and community activities.

The Ramah Chapter Renovation and Addition Project was completed in accordance with approved plans, specifications, and contractual requirements under Contract No. CO16341. Arviso Construction served as the general contractor, and the Ramah Navajo Chapter is the client and owner of the facility.

The scope of work included renovation of the existing chapter house and an expansion to increase the building's total square footage. Construction activities included site preparation, structural improvements, architectural finishes, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, and exterior improvements such as drainage, paving, fencing, and landscaping. At the Chapter's request, an additional 224 square feet was added to the project, with associated costs

funded by the Chapter.

The total project cost was \$2,076,360.17, funded through Capital Outlay funds (\$346,500.00), Sihasin funds (\$1,388,888.00), and Chapter funds (\$340,971.00).

The dedication ceremony was led by Ramah Navajo Chapter President Martha Garcia, who provided background on the Ramah Navajo Chapter and the Ramah Navajo School Board. Guest speakers addressed the role of the chapter house in supporting governance, coordination, and community use. Special guests included Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and Josett Monette, Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department.

The program included traditional blessings by a Navajo medicine man and prayers offered by local pastors.

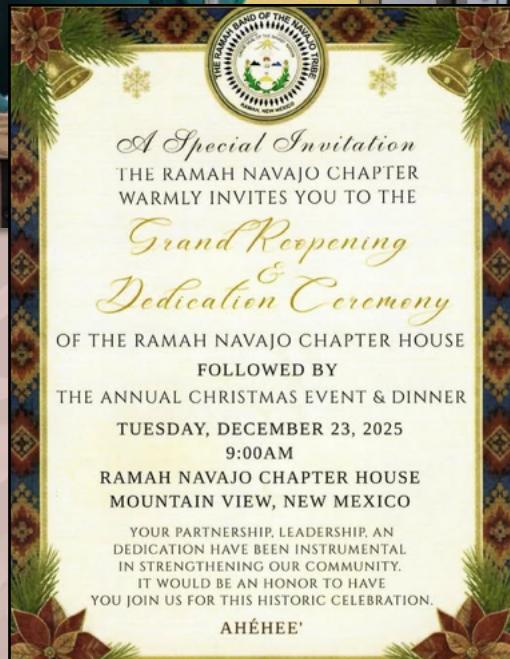
All construction work was completed in compliance with applicable building codes, approved drawings, and quality standards. Required inspections and testing were conducted with satisfactory results. The facility was inspected by the Navajo Nation Fire Department on April 24, 2025, and a facility assessment was completed by the Department of Health & Human Services on February 10, 2025. No outstanding safety i

ssues, deficiencies, or corrective work were identified.

The project has been formally handed over to the Ramah Navajo Chapter, including as-built drawings, operation and maintenance manuals, and applicable warranties and certifications. The facility has been accepted by the Chapter for ongoing use.



Pictures from Sharlene Soce Ramah Chapter



Pictures from Facebook post Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1W4wPZyW1y/>



# CPMD Welcome New Staff



Hi, I'm Frank Cereceres, and I'm a Project Manager with the Navajo Nation Capital Projects Management Department. What I do is pretty straightforward – I help get important projects from idea to reality by keeping everyone organized and on track.

I'm an Air Force veteran who's spent years managing complex projects in both military and healthcare settings. You know how challenging it can be when you've got tons of moving parts, different teams with their own priorities, and tight deadlines? That's where I thrive. I've learned how to bring people together, spot potential problems before they blow up, and keep things moving even when the pressure's on.

Throughout my career, I've handled everything from the initial "what exactly are we trying to build?" conversations all the way through to "okay, is this thing actually working like it should?"

I've dealt with IT systems, medical record platforms, security setups, building automation – basically the behind-the-scenes stuff that keeps facilities running smoothly. I've also navigated all the paperwork and processes that come with big projects (RFPs, change orders, inspections, compliance checks – you name it).

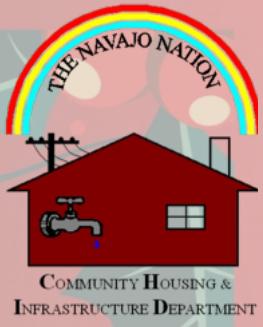
My approach is pretty simple: figure out what we're really trying to accomplish, make a solid plan, keep everyone in the loop, clear out whatever's blocking progress, and deliver something that actually works long-term. I'm hands-on because I believe the best way to ensure success is to stay close to the action and be ready to jump in when needed.



My name is Steven Harrison. I currently work for CPMD as an IT Technician. I am originally from Teec Nos Pos, Arizona. I graduated from Window Rock High School in 1986 and a Veteran of the US Army. I'm an NAU graduate (GO Lumberjacks) and worked in Information Systems most of my life. My passions are cooking, cycling, math, and building my relationships and meeting new people. I'm working toward building a breakfast place and specialize in LARGE hashbrowns... The Blue Plate Café.. look out for it!!! Thankful to be a part of CPMD and helping out everyday.



# Community Housing & Infrastructure Department



Left to Right: Ervin Tsosie, HIP Sr planner; Olescitta Tsedah, Chinle Eligibility Tech; Leslie Lee, Office Asst CDBG; Autumn John, FD Eligibility Tech; Jerrilyn Owens, Admin Asst; Patrick Dalgai, Dept. Mgr II; Alfreida Nez, SPPS CHID; Tyler Willatto, CHID Carpenter; Saraphina Curley, Sr OS CDBG; Jerome Myers, Field Spvsr CDBG

## CHID Delivers Real Results for Navajo Communities

The Community Housing & Infrastructure Department (CHID) continues to make measurable progress in improving housing and infrastructure for Navajo families. Through a combination of federal funding, partnerships with Chapters, and on-the-ground project management, the department has delivered concrete results that directly impact community well-being.

### Major Housing Investments and Funding Achievements

CHID successfully secured and is administering \$100 million in ARPA housing funds dedicated entirely to new housing construction. These funds were approved under Navajo Nation legislation and distributed equally among all 24 Council Delegate regions, ensuring fair and balanced access to housing resources across the Nation. Each region received more than \$4 million total from the two funding allocations, supporting long-term housing development.

### New Home Construction and Delivery Progress

In the Northern Agency, CHID has moved new housing projects from planning to delivery. Through coordinated work orders:

- \* 34 new homes have been fully delivered and set up under Work Order #3.
- \* 34 homesites were assessed and completed, including pad preparation and placement readiness.
- \* Additional work orders are underway, with applicant lists being finalized and future home deliveries planned.



These homes provide safe, modern housing for families who have waited years for stable living conditions.

### **Homesite Assessments and Planning**

In partnership with *liná Bá, Inc.*, CHID completed homesite location assessments for Northern Agency Chapters to prepare for incoming modular and manufactured homes. These assessments ensure:

- \* Proper site placement
- \* Safe land conditions
- \* Readiness for electric, water, and wastewater connections

CHID also worked directly with utility providers and applicants to guide families through the process of establishing service connections.

### **Housing Restoration and Emergency Repairs**

Despite budget limitations, CHID completed and advanced numerous home renovation and restoration projects approved in previous fiscal years. Accomplishments include:

- \* Full roof replacements
- \* Interior bathroom renovations
- \* Insulation and drywall installation
- \* Material assistance for home improvements



CHID's carpentry team responded quickly to emergency winter weather damage, completing urgent roof and structural repairs across multiple Chapters. Projects also included subfloor replacements, window and door upgrades, minor plumbing, and electrical repairs—helping families remain safely housed.

### **Strong Workforce and Equipment Readiness**

CHID maintained an active field workforce supported by essential heavy equipment, including a skid-steer, dump trailer, and cargo trailer. This equipment allows the department to respond efficiently to emergencies and complete projects on schedule.

### **Infrastructure and Grant Management Success**



Although no current CDBG projects are active in the Northern Agency, CHID has taken proactive steps by:

- \* Encouraging Chapters to prepare infrastructure proposals for **FY 2026 funding**
- \* Reprogramming project savings to support powerline connections for ARPA housing recipients
- \* Successfully submitting the **FY 2025 ICDBG grant application**
- \* Completing required federal reports and audits, including a 2025 audit with **no program findings**

### **Commitment to Accountability and Community Impact**

CHID continues to work closely with Chapter officials, delegates, and families to manage applicant priorities, communicate project status, and ensure transparency. Through careful planning, equitable funding distribution, and hands-on project execution, CHID has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening housing and infrastructure for Navajo communities—one home and one family at a time.



COMMUNITY HOUSING &  
INFRASTRUCTURE DEPARTMENT

# Key Turnover Ceremonies Mark New Beginnings for Homeowners in the Fort Defiance Agency



Jan 2, 2026 | News

As the Navajo Nation enters the New Year, key turnover ceremonies continue across the Nation, celebrating new beginnings for families receiving homes through the Community Housing and Infrastructure Department using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

Selected recipients are receiving homes across all five agencies under various work orders administered by the Division of Community Development (DCD).

On December 30, four homes were officially turned over to new homeowners in Klagetoh and Fort Defiance. Community representatives from the Office of the President presented keys and deeds, along with a congratulatory letter from Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren recognizing this important milestone.

Earlier in December, three additional homes were turned over to housing recipients in Twin Lakes, New Mexico. Prior to the Christmas holiday, Deputy Chief of Staff and Community Representative Gary Lewis presented keys to three new homeowners in Oak Springs and Pine Springs, Arizona.

Families also received holiday gift baskets and a holiday ham to celebrate together in their new homes.

Housing recipient Theresa Etsitty shared a heartfelt reflection in honor of her late husband, who passed away from cancer: We waited for this day to come, and although my husband isn't here to see it, my grandchildren and I will live in this house my husband and I could only wish for."

Division of Community Development staff were present at each turnover to provide homeowners with orientations, review warranty information, and offer guidance on home maintenance to support long-term success.

"Each home represents an important step forward in our fight against housing instability on the Navajo Nation," said President Nygren. "We work closely with our contractors and DCD staff every day to ensure resources are deployed where they are needed most. I look forward to seeing more families receive homes in 2026."

Looking ahead, the Community Housing and Infrastructure Department has been short-funded for Fiscal Year 2026.

However, the Housing Improvement Program will begin accepting new applications in February. In the meantime, DCD staff will continue delivering homes to previously selected applicants as work progresses agency by agency. Homes have already been delivered in the Northern and Eastern Agencies. Following completion in the Fort Defiance Agency, deliveries will begin in the Chinle Agency.

Additionally, the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office is coordinating with DCD to deliver homes in the Western Agency. The Navajo Nation remains committed to continuing the fight against homelessness and housing instability in 2026.

Happy New Year.

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/4jpgHIC>

# DCD Christmas Spirit Week 2025

From December 15–19, 2025, the Division of Community Development came together for our first-ever division-wide Christmas Spirit Week, featuring both in-person and virtual activities designed to include staff across all DCD departments, offices, and programs

## DCD CHRISTMAS SPIRIT WEEK 2025 ...

What made this week especially meaningful was the collaboration behind it—planned by a dedicated eight-member planning team and brought to life through enthusiastic participation from staff across the division.

**DCD CHRISTMAS SPIRIT WEEK 2025**

Open to all staff across the Division of Community Development & Departments under DCD.  
In-person events take place at Window Rock – Admin Building 2 (2nd Floor) unless noted.

**15** **Theme:** Dress Festive Colors (Red, green, gold, silver, blue)  
**Office Decorating Contest Launch**  
• All local offices invited to submit photos via Google Form  
• Voting takes place Friday, 12/19  
• **Hot Cocoa Bar – 8:30–10:00 AM (Window Rock)**

**16** **Theme:** Ugly/Cozy Sweater Day  
**Ugly Sweater Contest**  
Submit photos by **12:00 PM** (Google Form)  
Voting at **3:00 PM**  
**Holiday Trivia Showdown – 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM**  
Virtual via Kahoot (all offices welcome)  
Enjoy pastries & snacks (sign-up sheet coming soon)

**17** **DCD Christmas Luncheon – 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM**  
Quality Inn, Window Rock  
 **Theme:** Red/Green Business Casual  
(Agenda to be shared)

**18** **Theme:** Christmas Accessories  
(Santa hats, reindeer horns, bells, scarves, etc.)  
**Photo Booth – Window Rock**

**19** **Theme:** Pajama Day  
**Division Breakfast Social – 8:30–10:00 AM**  
Potluck style (sign-up sheet soon)  
**Office Decorating Contest Winners Announced**

[Event Website](#)

# DCD CHRISTMAS SPIRIT WEEK 2025 ...

The festivities kicked off with Festive Colors Day and the launch of the Office Decorating Contest, with offices sharing photos and creativity across locations. A Window Rock Hot Cocoa Bar helped set a warm and cheerful tone for the week.

Midweek highlights included Ugly & Cozy Sweater Day, an Ugly Sweater Contest, and a Holiday Trivia Showdown hosted at the DCD Location in Window Rock.



# DCD CHRISTMAS SPIRIT WEEK 2025 ...

On December 17th, The DCD Christmas Luncheon provided an opportunity for staff to gather, connect, and celebrate together.

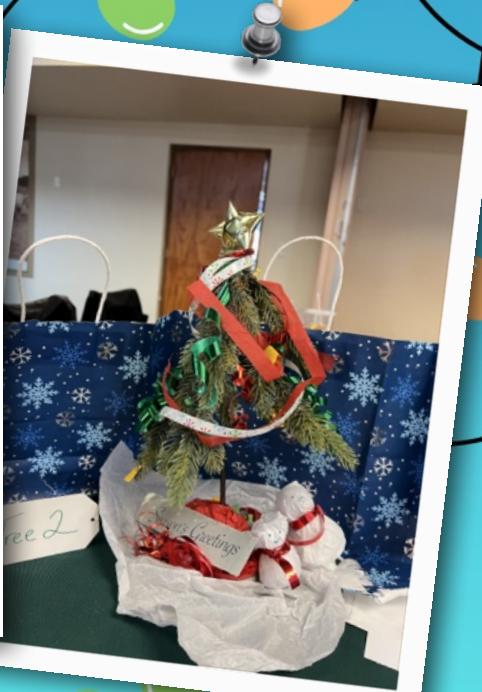
The week wrapped up with Christmas Accessories Day, festive photo moments, Pajama Day, and a Division Breakfast Social, followed by the announcement of the Office Decorating Contest winners.

Adding to the spirit was a division-wide Christmas playlist, curated from staff-submitted favorites and enjoyed throughout the week:

🎵 <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5fscIJlfM1pHp8bVBhZigz?si=fc48ab21e5a14f05>

Thank you to the Spirit Week Planning Team and to all staff who participated—whether in person or virtually—for helping make this first-ever DCD Spirit Week a memorable and unifying experience.

If you would like to view more, visit the event website: <https://sites.google.com/nndcd.org/2025dcדchristmas/home>

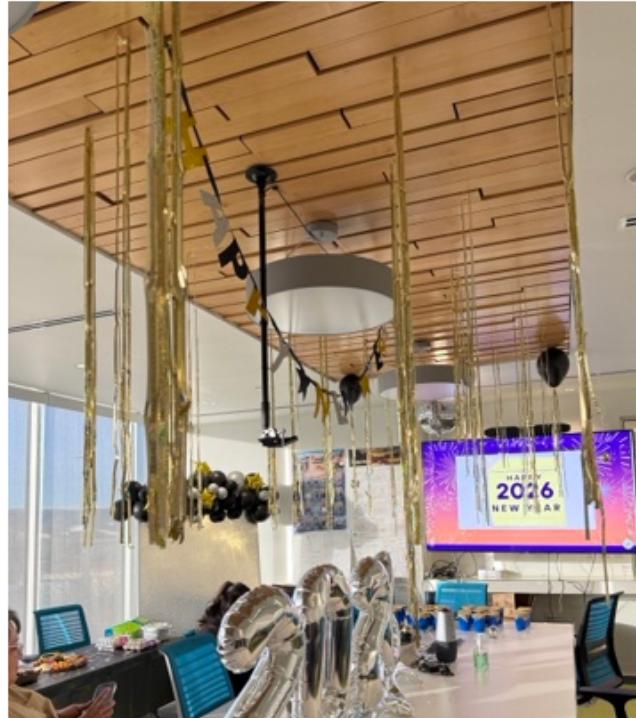


Division of Community Development

# HAPPY 2026 NEW YEAR

## New Year, New Beginnings

On December 30, 2025, our division rang in the New Year a little early with a fun mock countdown and charcuterie potluck as we headed into the Navajo Nation leave period (December 31–January 2). Staff gathered to celebrate, connect, and close out the year together before returning to the office on January 5, 2026. As we look ahead, we wish our readers a Happy New Year filled with health, success, and new opportunities in 2026.





*Administrative Services Centers*

# December Department Highlights

ASC offices stayed busy throughout December, supporting chapters, staff, and leadership across the Nation through a variety of meetings and trainings.

Staff provided ongoing fiscal and administrative support, including bank reconciliation training, guidance on stipend payments and fund approval forms, and discussions on chapter projects, scholarships, and policies. Several offices participated in regular chapter meetings and regional gatherings, including community meetings and the Agency Council Meetings.

December also included a strong focus on staff development. Highlights included employee performance appraisal support, Dayforce system discussions, and the Gallup ASC Office's multi-day

Staff Development Work Session, which featured guest speakers, program updates, and staff-led project activities. Department leadership also shared welcome and motivational messages, reinforcing teamwork and shared goals.





## Administrative Services Centers

### Crownpoint ASC Hosts December Staff & Officials Meeting

ASC Crownpoint held its Monthly Staff & Officials Meeting on December 16, 2025, at the Whitehorse Lake Chapter House, bringing together chapter officials and staff for a productive day of updates, discussion, and collaboration.



The meeting featured presentations on chapter projects from Michele Peterson, Department Manager II with CPMD, along with a review of chapter policies related to Student Financial Assistance and Scholarships. ASC Crownpoint staff also shared important updates on the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, Dayforce, and holiday leave coverage, helping ensure chapters are prepared as the year comes to a close.

The session concluded with updates from the 25th Navajo Nation Council and Office of the President and Vice President, as well as a discussion on recommended training topics for the upcoming year. The day wrapped up on a warm note with lunch hosted by the Whitehorse Lake Chapter, reflecting the strong partnership between the chapter and ASC staff.



Story Submission and Photo Credit: Heather Yazzie-Kinlacheeny, Crownpoint ASC SPPS



## Administrative Services Centers

### Gallup ASC Holds Three-Day Winter Staff Development Work Session

The Gallup ASC Office hosted a three-day Winter Staff Development Work Session at the Embassy Suites in Albuquerque, NM, focused on professional development, collaboration, and staff appreciation.

Day One kicked off with informative sessions from Employee Benefits, led by Eulanda Cicarello, and a representative from Retirement Services/401(k) Planning, providing staff with helpful resources and updates. The day also included staff-led activities and project development updates from the CPMD Department, presented by Michele Peterson, Department Manager, highlighting ongoing and upcoming work.



## Administrative Services Centers

**On Day Two, staff participated in a customer service training facilitated by ASC Department Manager Jaron Charley, followed by a presentation on self-care and preventing burnout. The day wrapped up with a team activity and end-of-day announcements, reinforcing communication and teamwork.**

**The work session concluded on Day Three with division updates, a special address by Pearl Yellowman, and an appreciation awards luncheon, recognizing staff for their dedication and hard work throughout the year.**

**The Winter Staff Development Work Session provided valuable learning opportunities while also creating space to connect, reflect, and celebrate the efforts of the Gallup ASC team.**



Story Submission and Photo Credit: Guarena Adeky,  
Gallup ASC SPPS

# **Staff Updates:**

## **Welcome New Hires and Congratulations, Tyler!**

As the year comes to a close, we're excited to share a few team updates that continue to strengthen our support for Navajo Nation Chapters. This month, we welcomed new staff and celebrated a well-deserved promotion, all of whom bring valuable skills and dedication to our work.

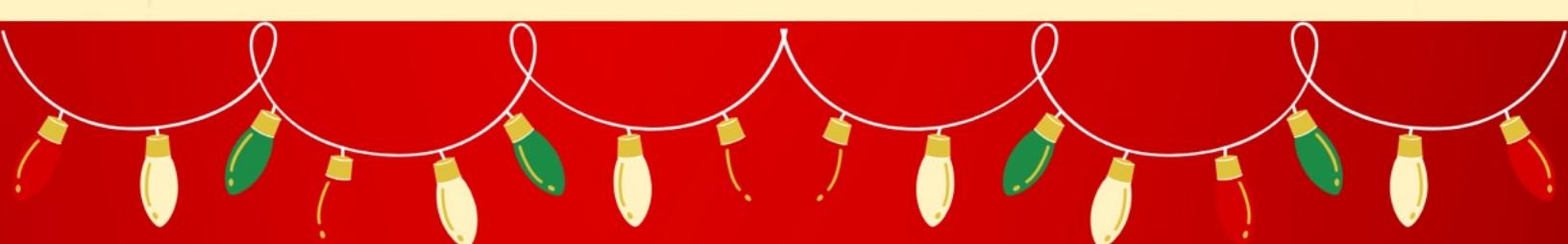
### **This December, we welcomed:**

- 2 Community Services Coordinators (CSC) supporting chapter programs and community connections
- 1 Accounts Maintenance Specialist (AMS) assisting with financial processes, records, and administrative compliance

### **We're also pleased to recognize a promotion:**

Tyler Harris, formerly an AMS with the Huerfano Chapter, has been promoted to Community Services Coordinator at the Nageezi Chapter. Congratulations to Tyler on this exciting next step!

Please join us in welcoming our new team members and congratulating Tyler as we head into the new year.



<b>Applicant Name:</b>	<b>Chapter:</b>	<b>Position:</b>
<b>Aaron Jones</b>	<b>Becenti Chapter</b>	<b>AMS</b>
<b>Kieon Halona</b>	<b>Rock Springs Chatper</b>	<b>CSC</b>
<b>Priscilla Lane</b>	<b>Tolani Lake Chapter</b>	<b>CSC</b>
<b>Tyler Harris</b>	<b>Nageezi Chapter</b>	<b>CSC</b>





## Chapter Updates

# Dilkon Chapter Community Gathering

Staff from the Dilkon ASC Office recently attended and represented the department at the Dilkon Chapter Regular Chapter Meeting on December 14, 2025, which also featured a Christmas dinner and Toys for Tots distribution. This gathering marked a meaningful moment for the community, as it was the first time in several years that a chapter dinner was held while the chapter facility underwent renovations. Community members came together to share a meal, celebrate the season, and reconnect in a welcoming space, highlighting the importance of community and continued support at the chapter level.



## Chapter Updates

# Leupp Chapter Spreads Holiday Cheer

The Leupp Chapter staff shared a playful holiday submission that brought smiles and laughter this season. Using the website [elfyourself.com](https://elfyourself.com/), chapter staff created a festive and funny dance video by uploading their photos, which were transformed into dancing elves spreading holiday cheer. The lighthearted video captured the joyful spirit of the season and reminded us of the importance of fun, creativity, and connection at our chapters. As they shared in their message, “The holidays make me dance!” — a cheerful way to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the “House” at Leupp Chapter.

Leupp Chapter's ElfYourself Video: <https://elfyourself.com/?mId=1118653>



**From the "HOUSE" Leupp Chapter, Happy Holiday**

# Bulletin Board

Tsineeshjíí' Naaltsoos Bídadíiljehí

## U of Idaho grad student's research aims to help her Navajo Nation overcome health crisis

BY John O'Connell

Photos by Malyndra Tome

December 10, 2025

Native American scholar Malyndra Tome publishes on health consequences of mining pollution among her people

University of Idaho graduate student Malyndra Tome views her education as a powerful asset in the Navajo Nation's quest to address a toxic drinking water supply, as well as systemic inequalities that have exacerbated a resulting health crisis.

Tome, 35, who was raised in the Navajo Nation's Ganado chapter in northeast Arizona, is pursuing a doctorate in water resources science and management under Professor Greg Moller.

The journal "Environments" recently published a review of scientific literature by Tome and Moller documenting how abandoned mines have contributed to arsenic and uranium contamination in the tribal water supply. They also reviewed how poor access to nutritious food and health care within the Navajo Nation is compounding health problems for many residents who are already sick from drinking bad water.

According to the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources, about 20-30% of Navajo Nation households lack access to a safe and reliable water supply, forcing them to haul in water for their culinary supply or to use unregulated livestock wells, which aren't regularly tested and often exceed safe drinking-water standards.

Uranium and arsenic exposure are linked to several forms of cancer, kidney disease, hypertension, high blood pressure, negative pregnancy outcomes, neurotoxicity and many other chronic illnesses. Furthermore, University of New Mexico's Navajo Birth Cohort Study found pregnant Navajo women had elevated uranium and arsenic levels in their urine.

An enormous problem

The Navajo Nation is enormous, spanning 27,000 square miles of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, with an average population density of just 6.2 people per square mile.

More than 1,200 mine sites, including 500 abandoned uranium mines, remain throughout the Navajo Nation.

"During the Cold War era, they were mining a lot of uranium, and the Navajo Nation became a hotspot for that," Tome said.

Tome's literature review cites a 2017, University of Arizona-led study in which 464 unregulated water sources – including



livestock wells, springs and ponds – were tested, and 15% of samples exceeded EPA's maximum contaminant level for arsenic, 13% exceeded standards for uranium and 3.9% exceeded standards for both chemicals.

Many residents of the Navajo Nation must travel hours to the nearest grocery store or health care facility, and malnutrition and lack of regular health screenings can make them more susceptible to health problems they experience from drinking toxins. The Navajo Nation has the nation's highest rate of food insecurity, having just 13 grocery stores. By comparison, the city of Moscow, where the U of I campus resides, has five grocery stores within a roughly 6-square-mile area.

Growing up, Tome had to drive a half hour to get to the nearest convenience store, which sold mostly junk food, and a trip to a grocery store with produce and meat departments took a couple of hours. Furthermore, most roads within the Navajo Nation are unpaved and can be unpassable during monsoon seasons.

"I live on the Navajo Nation, but there are still communities that

are 30 to 45 miles from the main highway I've never even been to or heard of," Tome said.

The Navajo Nation is also home to just 12 health care facilities, delaying diagnoses and treatments.

*"I think a lot of Indigenous communities are moving away from just anybody coming onto tribal nations and doing research. Now it's up to us as Indigenous people to go to these institutions of higher education, learn what we can and then bring back skills and knowledge into our own communities and make changes."*

**Malyndra Tome**

Doctoral student in water resources, science and management

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/4pfZWe9>

## After Seeing the Generosity of an 86-Year-Old Struggling to Pay Her Bills, He Gave Her the Ultimate Christmas Gift



Luke Chinman

Thu, December 18, 2025 at 2:39 PM MST

Connie, an 86-year-old Navajo woman in Phoenix, did not hesitate to pull out some cash from her wallet when she was approached by what she believed to be a man who couldn't afford his medication.

"Excuse me, ma'am, I'm so sorry, I'm in a lot of pain right now," content creator Jimmy Darts says to the unsuspecting woman, holding a pain-relieving medication, in a video he later uploaded to Instagram. "Do you have a dollar?"

Connie opened her purse, handing him a \$20 bill. But anyone familiar with Darts's social media accounts knows that wasn't where the video would end. Standing in the store's aisle, Darts continued to learn Connie's story: that she was struggling to put food on her table and afford her rent and had recently been hospitalized for her anxiety.

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/4qoatEW>

# Bulletin Board

## Scholarship honors Navajo Prep graduate's work with language and clean energy

By Alex Lee Tri-City Record Reporter

Friday, Dec 12, 2025 1:14 PM Updated Friday, Dec. 12, 2025 7:14 PM

A graduate of Navajo Preparatory High School was recently named one of six recipients of the 2025 U.S. Eagle Federal Credit Union scholarship, which awarded \$30,000 for projects addressing community concerns, bullying prevention and business development.

Hailey Thomas, of Lukachukai, Arizona, will receive \$5,000 to continue studying electrical engineering and computer science at the University of California, Berkeley.

Thomas said she was at the university clinic getting a flu shot when a New Mexico area code appeared on her phone.

"I was like, oh it's a 505 number I need to answer because I don't get any like calls like in my area," she said. "I answer, and he says, 'Congratulations,' and I started freaking out."

Thomas said she applied after seeing an advertisement for the scholarship and felt the community concern category fit a high school project perfectly.

The Concern for Community Scholarship asks students to share how they are taking action to get involved in their communities and how they are giving back to those in need.

During her sophomore year, Thomas translated the Australian Broadcasting Corporation animated show "Bluey" into the Navajo language to emphasize the importance of language revitalization.

That story stood out to scholarship committee member Chelsea Watkins while reviewing applications.

"It was a very emotional submission, and it was very thoughtful and you can tell she spent a lot of time on it," Watkins said. "I did watch the episode of Bluey that she submitted and I just found it to

be so amazing that she would take the time to do that so her community can have access to that content."

For Thomas, community brings the support she needs to succeed with teachings like "Táá hó'ájítéégo" that guide her academic journey.

Thomas said her journey in engineering began with wanting to change the future.

Looking to her community, Thomas has a passion for designing sustainable electrical systems that bring reliable power to Native communities while expanding global access to clean energy.

"I thought about the problems that my community faces, and it mainly tied to like electricity," she said. "I grew up with my grandparents. My grandma didn't have electricity nor running water, so it was a struggle – there's electricity now, but it's not sustainable, nor is it reliable, there's still a lot of people out there that don't have electricity."

The scholarship committee was able to see what was important to youths across the state in reviewing applications, Watkins said.

"It was really great for the committee to see what's important to our youths in New Mexico and what they want to do in their careers and in their lives," she said. "It gave us a chance to see what's relevant and what's going on."

According to Watkins, there were a number of submissions addressing the lack of health care in rural communities.

"They are passionate about it and they're leaving and going into college wanting to make a difference," she said. "Some of them are wanting to go into the medical profession so they can go back to



their hometowns and give back to their communities because they see that is completely missing where they live."

The diversity of the U.S. Eagle scholarships offers students the opportunity to submit applications that fit their passions without limiting them, Watkins said.

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/3KJmiqo>

## This Valley district will adapt curriculum for Indigenous students



Erick Trevino, Arizona Republic

Wed, December 24, 2025 at 5:01 AM MST

Tempe Union High School District is gearing up to launch a pathway program for Native American students to complete their course credits with an adapted curriculum that reflects their culture and helps them plan for life after graduation.

The Circle of Nations Pathway Program will launch in the 2025-26 school year at Tempe Union's Mountain Pointe High School and expand to Marcos de Niza High School the following year.

The program is a response to the lack of academic and cultural support that many Native American students face throughout high school, according to Valerie Molina, who oversees Native

American education at Tempe Union.

Many of her students will be the first generation in their family to graduate and lack the necessary guidance to plan their post-secondary future. Molina's even watched some students turn down full-ride scholarships due to a lack of planning.

A Native American, Molina went through a similar experience and hopes to change the course for future generations.

"I almost didn't graduate high school because I didn't have that support, and I didn't know that I had a scholarship waiting for me at ASU because there wasn't anybody around to tell me," she said.

When she started working for Tempe Union, she had identified 300 Native American students in the district. Two decades later, there are now roughly a thousand Native American students.

Post-secondary education can be intimidating for Native American students, she said, and the pathway program will help them either plan for college, a technical career, or join the military or workforce.

Native American students typically have lower graduation rates compared to their peers. For the 2025 graduating class, roughly 71% of Native American students graduated within four years compared to the state average at 80%, according to state data.

Across race, income level and background, they also have the highest chronic absenteeism rate in the state at 53% based on a recent report from the Helios Education Foundation.

Students on the pathway program will focus on completing or making up their credits to graduate on time. The program will also adapt curriculum to be a culturally enriched learning environment. According to Charlotte Winsor, director of federal programs at Tempe Union, even typical courses such as English and history will include Native American perspectives and voices.

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/3NkoDIW>

# Bulletin Board

## 2025 True Heroes: Violet Lucero

by Ungelbah Dávila on December 23, 2025

THE CEDAR BEAMS of Violet Lucero's loom stretch across a room that should be too small to hold it. Tools handmade by her father and bundles of wool yarn rest nearby. At the heart of this world of patterns and color sits the 71-year-old Navajo culture bearer, her hands moving in the steady, patient rhythm she has employed for more than six decades.

"I weave every day," Lucero says. "When you're weaving, you're praying and healing, and you think about different things that you put in there. Each line can tell a story."

The oldest of four girls, Lucero was just six years old when she was sent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs dormitory in Magdalena. Those years being away from home were hard, she recalls, even though the school was just 30 miles from her home in Alamo. She originally spoke no English and couldn't go home except during the summer and vacations, during which time she helped her mother herd their Churro sheep. Learning to care for sheep, Lucero says, is the first step toward becoming a weaver. In this way, she was able to keep connected to many of the traditional teachings, including the Navajo language.

After graduating from high school, Lucero began working for the Magdalena Municipal School District as an instructional assistant to first- and second-grade teachers. Over the next 30 years helping in the classroom, she worked with Navajo students who were learning English and taught the little ones the fundamentals of weaving by transforming cardboard boxes into looms.

"Little kids aren't afraid to just go for it," says Lucero, who recalls the children often turning scraps of yarn into small, joyful patterns. She combined the lessons with stories, passed down from her

grandfather, of sheep, coyotes, and how generations of Navajos used weaving to survive.

Over the course of her retirement, Lucero has introduced more than 300 students to weaving through classes at the Alamo Wellness Center. (She is currently focusing on her family and her own creations, however.) "I don't push anyone," she says. "You have to want to weave." But it's not just her knowledge that she passes along; she freely gifts her weavings—big and small—to members of her community.

When Lucero's grandson, Michael, had his eighth-grade promotion ceremony, she taught herself to weave necklaces out of ribbon for every child in his class. Many people in Alamo and Magdalena own something made by Lucero, from sash belts to little woven keychains. "Weaving is not just for yourself," she says. "It's meant to be shared."

"She is the grandma for everybody," says Clara Winston, Lucero's sister, who recalls that Violet was the only one who stayed and learned to weave from their mother when the rest of the kids snuck off to play. "She makes sure everybody's okay. She's just a rock."

Lucero's gifts symbolize more than a shared craft—they are a shared piece of a vital Navajo lifeway. Her weavings represent a continued relationship with the land, the sheep, and a culture thousands of years old. Every weaving Lucero makes represents the cultural resilience that Lucero, and others like her who were forced into assimilation, managed to hold onto for future generations. "Weaving is our tradition," she says. "It's done with our hands, but I keep it in my heart. It keeps us strong." READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/4jlP7WC>



## Fort Lewis College expands off-grid solar effort for Navajo Nation families

Honnold Foundation grant will support clean energy and water systems

By Elizabeth Pond Herald Staff Writer

Sunday, Dec 21, 2025 10:00 AM Updated Sunday, Dec. 21, 2025 3:53 PM

Fort Lewis College's Fundamental Needs Oasis Project and the Rural Clean Energy Partnership are expanding off-grid solar power and clean water access for Navajo Nation families—with high school and college students leading the installations. A \$150,000 grant from the Honnold Foundation will support solar installations, solar-powered water systems and renewable energy training for high school and Fort Lewis College students, according to a college news release.

Justice Ramos, executive director of Fundamental Needs, said about 15,000 homes on the Navajo Nation lack electricity—roughly 75% of all unelectrified homes in the country—and nearly one-third of the population lacks access to safe drinking water.

Fort Lewis College students will partner with Rock Point Community School, Kirtland Central High School and Durango School District students on installations after completing two asynchronous solar engineering courses at the college, the release said.

Fifteen solar home systems will be installed by the team, which will provide electricity for lighting, refrigeration, heating, water pumping and essential appliances, the release said. A 550-gallon solar-powered water system will also be given to each home to provide clean water for drinking and sanitation purposes.

FLC's Fundamental Needs' Oasis Project has been bringing off-grid water systems to families in Rock Point, Sweetwater, Red Mesa, Shiprock and Farmington since 2021.

The off-grid water and power system installations are led by FLC Engineering Professor Laurie Williams, who has worked to expand off-grid energy access in Navajo Nation communities for eight years.

"We're excited to be joining forces with Fundamental Needs," Williams said in the release. "This collaboration meets two critical needs: providing families with access to



clean energy and clean water while giving students real-world experience that opens pathways to careers in renewable energy."

READ MORE: <https://bit.ly/4qqz2B9>  
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## PERSONNEL NEWS -- DCD Open Positions

Naanish aą'idaat'éhigíí

POSITION TITLE	LOCATION	PAY RATE	CLOSING DATE
<b>Administrative Service</b>			
Community Services Coordinator (S)	Rock Springs, NM	\$44,098.56	1/14/2025
Accounts Maintenance Specialist (S)	Red Valley, AZ	\$31,257.36	1/6/2025
<b>Capital Projects Management Department</b>			
Project Manager (S)	Window Rock, AZ	\$51,364.80	1/7/2026
Senior Accountant (S)	Window Rock, AZ	\$26.82 Hourly	1/15/2026
<b>Community Development Block Grant Program</b>			
Program Supervisor II (S)	Window Rock, AZ	\$56,000.16	12/5/2025
(OUF) Open Until Filled			
(S) Sensitive Position (subject to background check)			
Closing Dates may change			

For the most up-to-date personnel info, please visit DPM's website at

<https://apply.navajo-nsn.gov/>

### Quote of the Month

Saad Baa  
Nitsáhakeesíí

### Comic of the Month

Baa Dlohasinigíí  
Naashch'aa'



# Navajo Nation Census Information Center News

## The 2025 Winter Holiday Season

December 16, 2025

Press Release Number: CB25-FF.11

The holiday season is a time to celebrate, reflect and give thanks. The U.S. Census Bureau presents the following facts and figures along with wishes for a healthy, happy holiday season.

These facts are possible thanks to the invaluable responses to U.S. Census Bureau surveys. We appreciate the public's cooperation as we measure America's people, places and economy.

### Did You Know?

#### **\$5.9 billion**

The estimated retail sales for the nation's department stores in December 2024.

Source: Monthly Retail Trade Survey

#### **13.7%**

The estimated percentage of 2024 hobby, toy and game store sales that occurred in December.

Source: Monthly Retail Trade Survey

#### **\$146.6 billion**

The estimated value of retail sales by electronic shopping and mail-order houses in December 2024, the highest estimated total for any month last year.

Source: Monthly Retail Trade Survey

#### **\$48.4 billion**

The fourth quarter 2024 seasonally adjusted after-tax profits for U.S. retail trade corporations with assets of \$50 million and over, up \$3.3 billion from the \$45.1 billion recorded in the third quarter of 2024.

Source: Quarterly Financial Report

#### **\$2.97 billion**

The value of U.S. imports of Christmas decorations from China for 2024. China led the way with 86.8% of the U.S. total imports of Christmas decorations.

Source: International Trade Statistics, Harmonized System Codes 9505.10 (Christmas decorations)

International Trade

USA Trade Online

#### **\$301.3 million**

The value of U.S. imports of LED Christmas tree lights for 2024. Cambodia led the way with 66.6% of the total U.S. imports of LED Christmas tree lights.

Source: International Trade Statistics, Harmonized System Code 9405.31 (LED Christmas Tree Lighting Strings)

International Trade

USA Trade Online

#### **485 establishments**

The number of employer establishments nationwide that primarily produced dolls, toys and games in 2023, a decrease of 18 establishments from 2022 (503 establishments). These establishments employed 5,442 workers in the pay period, including March 12, a decrease of 935 employees from 2022 (6,377 employees). California led the nation with 65 establishments in 2023.

Source: 2023 County Business Patterns

2022 County Business Patterns

#### **\$1.11 billion**

The value of U.S. imports of tapered candles in 2024. Most of these came from Vietnam, representing 54.8% of America's imported tapered candles, followed by Canada with 14.3%.

Source: International Trade Statistics, Harmonized System Code 3406 (Candles, tapers, and the like)

International Trade

USA Trade Online

# Merry Metrics

A Population Snapshot of Holiday-Sounding Towns





# Get Ready, it's here!

# COMMUNITY LAND USE PLANNING WEBSITE!!



## What does the website entail?

- Community land use planning orientation video - you can now watch the orientation video virtually!
- Community land use planning documents:
  - Community Assessment Surveys
  - CLUPC Requirement listings
  - Title 26 of the NN Code, Section 2004; Community Based Land Use Plan; Land Use Variations
- Resources
  - Census 2020 Website
  - Map Request
- Community Land Use PowerPoint
- Technical Assistance Request link



Scan me!



# TRASH SAFETY TIPS

Keep Our Community Clean & Safe

## Safe Disposal Practices

- Always bag your trash securely before placing it in the bin.
- Avoid overfilling bins- lids should close completely
- Dispose of sharp objects (glass, metals, needles) in sealed containers
- Keep hazardous waste (chemicals, batteries, oil) out of regular trash

## Bin Safety

- Place bins on flat surface to prevent tipping.
- Keep bins away from children.
- Do not climb into or play around bins and dumpsters.
- Watch for moving trucks when bins are being serviced.

## Community responsibility

- Report illegal dumping to your chapter officials or Solid Waste Management.
- Participate in community clean-up events.
- Reduce waste by recycling and composting when possible.

## Remember

- A clean and safe community benefits you.
- Do your part - handle trash responsibly.



## For Questions or To Report Illegal Dumping

Navajo Nation Division of Community Development - Solid Waste Management Department

[ltullie@nndcd.org](mailto:ltullie@nndcd.org)  
[\(505\) 318 - 6860](tel:(505)318-6860)



# Nitch'its'oh 2025

The DCD Newsletter, "Community Info", is produced monthly by the Division of Community Development and is a resource for division staff and chapters.

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