



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáadi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren's message to new police graduates is to be recognized as leaders, be part of the community they serve

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – They are called “The Magnificent Seven.”

On Friday, seven Navajo Police Academy recruits – six men and one woman – completed 1,000 hours of training, took their oaths and had loved ones pin badges onto their shirts.

It was the last piece of equipment for them to put on to become Navajo Nation police officers.

“These are the people we call in times of emergency and urgency,” said

Michael Anderson, executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety. “When people are upset, who do they point the finger at? That badge. That uniform. These people here are going to take that on for the next 20-plus years.”

He said that all through it, those who will support them the most are their families who supported them through the academy.

“You are a servant of the people,” Director Anderson told the recruits. “Recognize your position as a symbol of public faith and the trust that goes along with it.”



Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety Michael Anderson leads the seven new Navajo Nation police officers through their oath at the Navajo Nation Museum on March 15.

Class 59 began with 12 recruits. At their graduation reception, the seven new officers spoke of the rigors of training and their gratitude for their families and one another to get through it with encouragement, a laugh, a meal or a hug.

The new Navajo Nation police officers are Vernon Chee, Ardy Johnson, April Morris, Jonathan Robertson, Vincent Tsosie, Laken Wauneka and Roy Luani.



Officer Roy Luani said it was his family first and his classmates who helped motivate him through the police academy training.

Officer Luani, who is full Samoan from the Polynesian island country of the Independent State of Samoa, approximately 2,600 miles southwest of Hawaii, performed the “Siva Tau,” a Samoan warrior dance that evokes ferocity.

“My family is my motivation and my inspiration why I do the things I do,” he said. “I want my kids to look up to me and be proud of me.”

Patrick Sandoval, chief of staff in the Office of the President and Vice President, spoke on behalf of Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren to offer his congratulations to the new officers.

He said President Nygren wants each new officer to join him for a luncheon at his office so he can congratulate and thank them himself.

Mr. Sandoval’s message from the President was that that law enforcement can be seen from a community perspective.

“I encourage each and every one of you to get out there and to become a part of the community with the youth, with the elderly,” he said. “Work with community leadership. Work with the community people. We asked you to become leaders.”

Because of the geographic isolation of the Navajo Nation and the necessity of Navajo police officers to often work alone, Mr. Sandoval credited the academy’s command training staff for turning the recruits into the best, most resourceful law enforcement officers in the country because they most often work alone and



OPVP Chief of Staff Patrick Sandoval, who joined the class for a photo, said these recruits are among the best trained and most resourceful officers in the country because they often patrol alone.

have to defuse dangerous and emotional situations.

He said he was asked that morning what the one thing was he would tell the new officers.

“I would commend them on their bravery,” Mr. Sandoval said. “Navajo police officers do it through thick and thin. They do it without backup that's not always available. They do it with equipment that might be antiquated. They do it with communication equipment that's not quite where it needs to be. But this administration is working on that. Your safety has to be our priority.”

A 2021 organizational assessment of the Navajo Police Department by Strategy Matters and Public Safety Leadership found the department needs an additional 500 officers to adequately cover the 27,000 square miles of the Navajo Nation.

Currently there are about 250 Navajo officers among patrol, criminal investigation and internal affairs.

With 110 chapters, Mr. Sandoval said he would like to see two new recruits from each chapter apply to

the police academy to bring officer numbers up.

Police recruitment, retention and retirement of public safety officials is a priority of the Nygren Administration for the safety of Navajo citizens.

“The uniform that you're wearing has a tremendous amount of significance,” he said. “That badge actually represents a *tsiiyéél* (a Navajo hair bun). The people who preceded these individuals today came up with everything they're wearing – the color, the style, the symbolism. It's not just a uniform. It represents Navajo.”



For the protection of Navajo communities and the safety of Navajo police officers, Mr. Sandoval said President Nygren is working on a Digital Equity Initiative to bring high-tech communications such as AT&T's FirstNet throughout the Navajo Nation by 2028.

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Navajo Nation Supreme Court Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne administers the officers' oath and Code of Ethics at their reception.