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NAVAJO NATION COURTS CELEBRATE 60TH ANNIVERSARY

The Navajo Nation Courts are celebrating their 60th anniversary at this year's annual Justice Day events.

Each year, the courts observe the establishment of the Navajo Nation's own judicial system with activities at celebrations known as Justice Day.

Before having its own court system, the Navajo Tribe had courts that were under federal government control. In the 1950s, a proposal was introduced in the state of Arizona to take over the Navajo courts using the then newly-enacted federal Public Law 280. The Navajo Tribal Council acted at that time to approve a resolution that abolished the Navajo Courts of Indian Offenses, which were courts of the Department of Interior, and declared the existing courts as courts of the Navajo Tribe. The resolution became effective April 1, 1959. The establishment of its own court system was an inherent exercise of sovereignty by the Navajo government.

Notably, the Navajo people had their own form of dispute resolution before a court system was in place where they talked things out with leaders who were selected by community consensus. This process is recognized today through the Judicial Branch's Peacemaking Program. As part of its function, the Peacemaking Program provides education on traditional customs and Diné Fundamental Law.

Today there are 11 judicial districts with district and family courts and offices for the Peacemaking Program and Probation & Parole Services. The Navajo court system also has a Supreme Court that hears appeals.

The Navajo Nation courts have been called the flagship of indigenous courts and many look to them to protect the sovereignty of all American Indian courts.

Justice Day activities at the courts give the public an opportunity to visit the judicial districts and to learn about how the Navajo justice system works. The judicial districts will be observing Justice Day with various activities that seek to provide public education. Aneth Judicial District,

for example, is planning to conduct a mock hearing. Kayenta Judicial District is hosting an open house with presentations by the court, probation and peacemaking. The Supreme Court and Window Rock Judicial District are joining together this year and will be hosting a morning fun run/walk.

The schedule for Justice Days is as follows:

April 1, 2019

Supreme Court/Window Rock Judicial District, Window Rock, Arizona

April 4, 2019

Dził Yijiin Judicial District, Pinon, Arizona

April 5, 2019

Chinle Judicial District, Chinle, Arizona
Kayenta Judicial District, Kayenta, Arizona
Tuba City Judicial District, Tuba City, Arizona
Ramah Judicial District, Ramah, New Mexico
Shiprock Judicial District, Shiprock, New Mexico

April 12, 2019

Alamo Court, Alamo, New Mexico

April 15, 2019

Aneth Judicial District, Aneth, Utah

April 26, 2019

Dilkon Judicial District, Dilkon, Arizona

May 3, 2019

Crownpoint Judicial District, Crownpoint, New Mexico
To'hajiilee Court, To'hajiilee, New Mexico

More information on the various Justice Days will be available on the www.navajocourts.org website.

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