



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 23, 2018

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Navajo leaders honor the late Paul Williams, Sr. on Navajo Nation Sovereignty Day

STEAMBOAT, Ariz. – Speaker LoRenzo Bates gathered with Vice President Jonathan Nez, Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, Apache County Dist. II Supervisor Alton Joe Shepherd, former President Peterson Zah, and chapter officials during an event to celebrate Navajo Nation Sovereignty Day, and to honor the late Paul Williams, Sr. on Monday, at the Steamboat Chapter house.

The event centered on a U.S. Supreme Court case decided in 1959, in which Paul Williams, Sr. and his wife Lorena Williams – both were residents of the Steamboat community – filed a lawsuit against a non-Navajo trading post owner for taking a herd of sheep from the Navajo couple to recoup a supposed debt. The Williams vs. Lee case eventually went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled unanimously in favor of Williams and determined that tribal courts have jurisdiction over civil cases involving non-Navajos that conduct business on the Navajo Nation.

Speaker Bates and Apache County District II Supervisor Alton Joe Shepherd, who is also a member of the Navajo Nation Council, presented the family of Paul Williams, Sr. and Lorena Williams with an honorary plaque during the event.

“Together, these two individuals challenged the United States in the Williams vs. Lee case and it ended up being one of the largest legal victories for the Navajo people and all of Indian Country,” stated Speaker Bates. “It reasserted the sovereign status of the Navajo Nation and upheld our rights as the first people of this land, and the rights that our past leaders fought for in the Treaty of 1868.”



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Apache County District II Supervisor Alton Joe Shepherd, Vice President Jonathan Nez, Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, former President Peterson Zah, and the family of the late Paul Williams, Sr. at the Steamboat Chapter house on April 23, 2018.

The event marked the start of a weeklong celebration hosted by the Apache County District II Office in accordance with National County Government Month, which is recognized by the National Association of Counties each year in the month of April. The theme for this year's celebration is, "Serving the Underserved," according to Supervisor Shepherd.

"We are focusing on this year's theme by educating our constituents about the services we provide and the partnership and relationship-building underway with other governments. We also wanted to recognize the leadership and perseverance of Paul Williams Sr., and Lorena Williams for their contribution to Navajo sovereignty and it was fitting to have the Williams family here to accept a plaque of honor presented to them and Steamboat Chapter. There is a special relationship with the Navajo Nation and it begins with respect and common goals that we are working hard to achieve. We want to exhibit health and wellness activities, community building, and involvement by respecting our Mother Earth," stated Supervisor Shepherd.

The county will host fun run/walk events, trash pickup events, as well as an "Elder Day." Supervisor Shepherd welcomes and encourages the public to participate in the special events. For more information on the events, please call (928) 755-3881 or (928) 729-2141.

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