Running for warriors: Navajo Code Talker 29K/10K Run

Written by Story and photos by Duane Haven Sun Correspondent
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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The 3rd Annual Navajo Code Talker 29K/10K Run was staged Sept.

10 at the Navajo Nation Museum.

This gathering brought together the local communities to engage with one another through health and fitness. They also got to meet a few of the elite soldiers, the Navajo Nation's prized treasure, the Navajo Code Talkers. Two of the honorable Navajo Code Talkers that were in attendance was John Kinsel, Sr. and Peter McDonald.

Approximately 200 participants ages from young to experienced were among the registered to run the 29K/10K. Many supporters were in attendance to cheer on their beloved contestant. The Navajo Code Talker Run brought together family, friends, veterans, active-duty-service members, and competitors from all over the country.

Kristy Orona from Riverside, Calif. was one of many competitors to take on the 10k (six miles) challenge. It was her first visit to Window Rock. As a female body-builder this was a challenge for her. "The Navajo Code Talkers are a national treasure," she said. "Knowing what they did, knowing how they served their country, knowing the sacrifices they have made as war heroes and how they struggled with that secret when they got home."

In partners with the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation and the Navajo Nation Office of the President and the Vice President, the Navajo Youth Empowerment Services had another successful event. Navajo YES promotes community wellness, lifelong fitness and youth empowerment across the Navajo Nation.

The Director of Navajo YES, Tom Riggenbach was happy with the turn out and participation within the community.

"Navajo YES is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit that wants to get the people and the community out to experience the parks, spend time with their family, get some health and wellness going and have a good time," he said.

Among many of the runners were veterans who ran for a cause. Whether it was running for a loved one, a fallen soldier, or running for their father who was a national treasure, a Navajo

Code Talker. Regina Roanhorse, US Army veteran dedicated this race to her father, Navajo Code Talker Thomas H. Begay and brother SSG Reginald Begay. Roanhorse completed the 29K (eighteen miles) run.

“I was honored to participate in this run as a female veteran and for all Native American female officers and enlisted – past and present to show that we have guts too,” she said.

The main course is a 10K loop that 29K runners complete three times and the 10K runners finish once. There was plenty of volunteers on site to assist and aid everyone. Available were three aid stations along the running route to assist with water, fruit, snacks and energy gels to keep the runners hydrated and safe.

There were all-terrain vehicles on hand used to keep a close eye on all the runners for their safety. Overall and age group awards were presented to the 29K and 10K runners at the conclusion of the race.

The Navajo YES program will continue with the Navajo Nation Parks Race Series throughout the Navajo Nation with several upcoming races. Their community service initiatives have led to the creation of many miles of trails across the reservation. Their continued efforts in educating and reaching out to the communities and neighborhoods is in the thousands.

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