‘A transparent government – that is what we are working toward’

Written by Story & Photos by Chrissy Largo Sun Correspondent
Friday, 29 January 2016 07:18





FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. –The Fort Defiance Chapter proudly received their Local Governance Act certification that took place on Jan.15, as the Navajo Nation Resources and Development Committee held their regular meeting, which included Legislation No.0407-15, for approval of the chapter’s Five Management System polices and procedures.

The Fort Defiance Chapter is one of the largest chapters within the Fort Defiance Agency, which includes 26 other chapters, and it continues to grow. It is now the 44th chapter to receive LGA certification.

Jumping back from a history of misuse of chapter funds from the previous administration, and the revolving door of staff members, Georgina Chischilly, account maintenance specialist, was recognized as one of the most dedicated and loyal staff members at Fort Defiance Chapter.

It brought tears to her eyes to see this day come to fruition.

“I’ve been here for fifteen years, I went through a lot and I can’t believe that we’ve came this far, and we are getting certified,” she said.

However, she is not the only veteran who waited for this day to come. Community Land Use Planning Committee President, Frank Nez Jr. waited a total of 14 years and four complete audits to reach this long-awaited goal.

“There was so many involved when putting together the original Land Use Plan,” he said. “I’ve lived here all my life and I want to see Fort Defiance move upwards. I want to see people serve better.”

The process in getting certification is a tedious one because it focuses on the Chapter’s implementation of a five management system that entails “accounting, procurement, filing, personnel and property,” based off of the criteria set into place of the Local Governance Act of 1998.

A review and approval process is required by the Auditor General’s Office, in accordance to Title 26 Section 102, to ensure that the chapter has followed the internal control policies and effectiveness of the FMS process.

With a community with now more than 6,000 members, and 3,000 registered voters, as the population continues to rise, Chapter Vice President Lorraine Nelson said she is hoping the LGA certification will help provide the infrastructure needed for new homes because more community members are residing or planning to reside in Fort Defiance.

“We want to enter a partnership concept with all the entities that are helping the people get services,” she said. “That will be one of our main efforts and our key concept that will help us grow and help our whole community grow.”

Born and raised in Fort Defiance, Chapter Secretary/Treasurer, Brenda Wauneka, could not agree more. She added that communication and staying together as a team helped them achieve certification.

“We want accomplishment,” she said. “We want to reach our goals and that is basically why we are here every day, helping the chapter. We want a good community. We want to build.”

Chapter President Zondra Bitsuie lauded the efforts of her staff and community, stating that it was a hard road to achieve LGA certification because a lot of things had to change starting at the chapter level.

“The community molded us to change,” she said. “A transparent government that is what we are working toward. We want the community to be involved and know that we are here working for them, and they are there to keep us in check. Ask us questions and see what we are doing. We welcome that and we thank all of you.”

During the certification event, she gave a special thank you to Community Services Coordinator Tony K. Watchman, and Chischilly, in their coordination and teamwork.

An optimistic Watchman contributed by stating that land wise, Fort Defiance is going to develop, in leaps and bounds, and the possibilities are endless.

“At Fort Defiance, we are looking at how do we promote Fort Defiance as a chapter, meaning economically, financially, and being responsible to our community members?” he said. “It goes back to them, how their wellbeing is and what is going to work for the community, as a whole, and not just as the chapter and chapter government.”

RDC members approved the legislation with a vote of 3-0.

“Certainly this is a milestone and a great accomplishment. I commend you for the well-done and outstanding job,” RDC member Davis Filfred said. “Whatever you guys want to be, as this chapter, if you want to go in to business, you can exercise that to the fullest and getting revenue and returning that back to the chapter.”

The community of Fort Defiance is located about seven miles north of Window Rock, Ariz.