

NN branches sign proclamation recognizing Diné College's 50th Anniversary

Written by Staff Reports

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WINDOW ROCK — The Navajo Nation Council declared 2018 as a celebration of “The 50th Anniversary of Diné College,” at the Jan. 23 Winter Council Session.

A proclamation was signed by Nation Nation President Russell Begaye, Navajo Nation Speaker Lorenzo Bates, Diné College President Charles Roessel and Interim Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation Thomas J. Holgate.

Among those attending the signing were Greg Bigman, Theresa Hatathlie, Felisha Adams, Nelson BeGaye and Tommy Lewis of the Diné College Board of Regents.

“This is an acknowledgement of the 50th anniversary of Diné College,” Bigman said. “Diné College, which was originally called Navajo Community College, was an experiment to other Native American tribes who started community colleges themselves.”

The proclamation references the start of Diné College in 1968 as Navajo Community College. In 1971, reads the proclamation, the federal Navajo Community College Act authorized “grants to the tribe for the construction, maintenance and operation of Navajo Community College and that it be designed and operated by the Navajo tribe to ensure that qualified Navajo and other applicants have educational opportunities.”

When the College was called Navajo Community College, classes were conducted in mobile homes in Many Farms, Ariz. The College later moved to Tsaile.

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"Fifty years is quite an achievement," President Begaye said upon signing the proclamation. "We're really proud to have a College of our own. "We still hear the (Diné College) name all over the country, and it reminds us of our legacy and our commitment to move forward."

The timing of the 50th anniversary is significant, Roessel said. The College was founded on the centennial anniversary of the Treaty of 1868. While the Navajo Nation prepares to commemorate 150 years since its ancestors returned from Hwéeldi, Diné College is honoring its past and preparing for the future, he said.

"We established the first tribal college press and began working on a history of the treaty at 100 years," Roessel said. "One of the first books we published was about the Treaty of 1868."

The main campus of Diné College in Tsaile broke ground in April 1973 and there grew five additional campuses after that in Crownpoint, Chinle, Tuba City, Shiprock and Window Rock.