



October 10, 2010 **Section:** Breaking **Article ID:** 16306991

## **Navajo runners raise money for reservation health**

*Ryan Boetel The Daily Times*

CHICAGO — Two Navajo runners pounding out 40-plus miles per week on unpaved roads under Red Mesa sunsets gave the runners the stamina to raise money for health initiatives throughout the Navajo Nation. Echo Lefthand and Christa Zubieta, along with Wisconsin resident Matti Donovan, completed the Chicago Marathon Sunday, raising more than \$1,000 each for ThinkFirst Navajo and Eve's Fund - two nonprofit organizations that raise awareness for several health issues in the Nation.

The programs, and distance running in general, are influencing Navajo youth and will hopefully improve overall wellness on the reservation, said Lefthand, a school health coordinator for Indian Health Services.

"When you run you just have a lot of time to think about different things in your life," he said. "When we're talking about obesity and diabetes among teenagers and adolescent kids and reducing those numbers, my ideas come when I'm running. "

Created in 2005, ThinkFirst Navajo is a chapter of a national organization directed at injury prevention. The reservation chapter focuses on reducing motor vehicle accidents among young people.

Fatal injuries on Navajo highways are about three times the national average, said Dr. Bob Cromwell, a retired physician and co-founder of both organizations.

The organization pays for paraplegic Navajos to speak at schools across the reservation in hopes of promoting safe-driving habits, he said.

Also created in 2005 after the death of Crowell's daughter, Eve, Eve's Fund finds providers and counselors who can work throughout the reservation, addressing issues like suicide, depression, diabetes, mental illness, literacy and substance abuse, which also occur in the reservation with more per capita compared to the rest of the country, Cromwell said.

"That's our niche," he said. "If someone in the community says we have a problem with literacy,' or, we have a problem with mental health,' we look for providers who can help."

The Chicago Marathon draws about 30,000 runners per year, which will make the course much different from the routes where Lefthand and Zubieta trained.

"Hopefully we can influence some younger runners as well," Lefthand said.

The race was Zubieta's second marathon; she finished the Seattle Marathon in 2005. She started running while working in the Peace Corps in Honduras eight years ago.

"I think (running) makes me calmer and more balanced," she said. "Running is a way for me to create structure in a chaotic environment."

It is the first time she will be running for someone other than herself.

"When (Lefthand) told me that we were running for a cause, that's what inspired me to run the race," said Zubieta, a public health nurse for IHS. "I feel that by running, it might be showing people that yes, you can be motivated to find ways to improve your health."

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