

Eve's Fund – Promoting Native Hope & Wellness

ThinkFirst Navajo

Summer Newsletter 2008

BIG SUCCESS FOR SUPER SPEAKERS & NEW PROGRAMS

New Role for Eve's Fund as Promoter & Co-Sponsor

Magic Tree House Speakers Excite Navajo Children to Read



Mary Pope Osborne, creator of the Magic tree House series, speaks to Navajo kids about the fun and magic of reading.

Mary Pope Osborne started the Magic Tree House series of children's books in 1992. Since then the series has entered most primary schools across the country, and more than 55 million copies have been sold worldwide. These books are continuously on the New York Times best seller lists, and they are a great force for literacy.

The Magic Tree House is where the young siblings, Jack and Annie, go to make a wish and then find themselves in distant times and places. For example, in Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs, where the curious pair get into ancient Egyptian clothing and exciting adventures.

On April 16 and 17, the authors of the Magic Tree House series visited Navajo kids in grades 3-6. Our co-sponsor, Navajo Coordinated School Health, made all the arrangements and, through teachers, enrolled 2,000 stu-

dents. Prior to the visit, Random House, the publisher of the series, sent a sample book to each enrolled student. Mary was accompanied on the Reservation by her sister, Natalie Pope Boyce, who writes fact books to accompany the adventure stories, her husband, Will Osborne, who has written **Magic Tree House – The Musical**, and Dr. Bob Crowell of Eve's Fund, who suggested the visit to the Navajo children.

Great moment: All four visitors were riding in a rental van through the rugged high desert, heading to the initial presentation to be held in the Phil Thomas Performance Center in Shiprock, NM. Suddenly they found themselves alongside a yellow school bus filled with Navajo kids, and half of them were reading Magic Tree House books! The visitors rolled down the windows and yelled and waved, finally catching the attention of a few kids. The kids looked puzzled, then caught on. Word spread quickly, and all of the kids started waving wildly and holding their books up to the windows. Later, after arriving in the performance hall, Mary opened the program with the story of the school bus. Cheering broke out in one corner of the auditorium where the kids from the bus were sitting.

In the Shiprock performance hall, Mary further connected with the kids



Mary, center, is joined on stage by her sister Natalie, who writes fact books to accompany the fiction books, and husband Will, who wrote Magic Tree House – The Musical, coming to Shiprock in 2009.

by telling her own story – how she made up stories as a little girl and then went on to create the heroes of Magic Tree House and their adventures. In four presentations, the Magic Tree House team showed more than 1,500 Navajo kids that reading is exciting and fun.



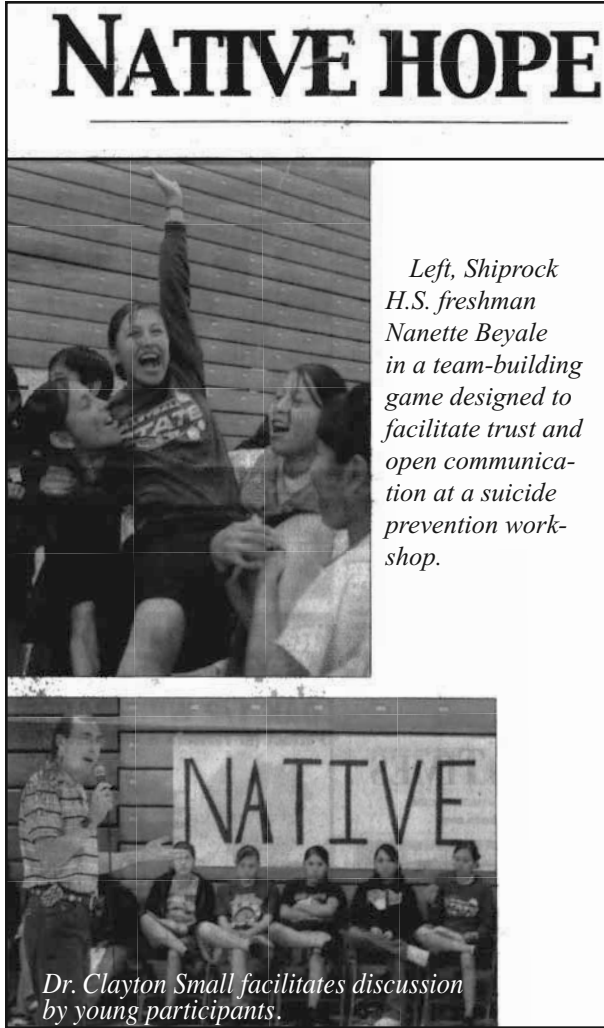
"Could you autograph my book, please?" Charismatic Mary inspires her young readers to read, write, and dream.

Many observers confirmed the visit's success. For example, 4th grade teacher Lisa Madera said, "I have one boy who has become obsessed with [the books]

and had really been a very slow reader, he is now scoring A's in reading." A representative of the Tribal Council, Leila Help-Tulley, wrote to thank the speakers – "you energized our children."

There was more: after the presentations, Darlene Begay of Coordinated School Health invited the four visitors to her extended family's home for a vegetarian feast. As Mary later recalled, "we slept overnight in a Hogan without running water and electricity,

with a wood stove fire burning all night (it was cold and windy outside) and then we threw open the door at dawn, and the scent of the burning pinion wood filled the air, and the red sunrise blinded us ... we were given more than we gave."



Left, Shiprock H.S. freshman Nanette Beyale in a team-building game designed to facilitate trust and open communication at a suicide prevention workshop.

Getting Youths to Talk about Suicide in Order to Prevent it

On May 6-8, Eve's Fund co-sponsored a 3-day conference of H.O.P.E training, a program aimed to prevent suicide among youth. H.O.P.E stands for Helping Our People Endure. The rate of native suicide is nearly 2.5 times the national average. Clayton Small, PhD, has introduced a suicide prevention curriculum geared specifically toward American Indian students.

Talking about death and suicide is taboo in many American Indian cultures. Instead, Dr. Small encourages students "to break the code of silence" and direct peers toward people and resources that can help. "The goal of the workshop is to forge a connection between the youth and community resources, Dr. Small said".

About 80% of people who commit suicide told at least one person. That person could make a call and save a life

Dr. Small also discussed factors which may lead to suicide, such as drug use, poverty, mental illness, and abuse.

A team of health professionals facilitated student role-playing and team-building competitions designed to foster self-esteem, trust, and open discussion.

The success of the workshop is demonstrated by the photo on the left and by the turnout - 109 young participants at Shiprock High School

Y.E.S. Empowers Navajo Youth Through Adventure Activities

Led by Tom Rigenbach, Youth Empowerment Services strives to empower Navajo youth through adventure activities that integrate education and service as part of the fun.

The centerpiece of Y.E.S. is the **Tour de Rez**, a summer long trip that takes kids all around the Reservation. Participants travel mostly on mountain bikes, sometimes on foot or river rafts. Most nights are spent in tents. The average

journey takes about a week and covers about 140 miles. The entire Tour extends 1200 miles around the Rez. 800-900 riders participate each summer. Volunteers help with safety and trail-side education.

Y.E.S. offers other outdoor activities all year round. The **Chuska Challenge** provides a weekend of awesome autumn bike riding. Backpacking treks explore wilderness at Grand Canyon

and many other beautiful sites on the Navajo Nation.

School programs include classroom presentations on fitness, nutrition, substance abuse, rez geography, and other topics. Y.E.S. works with local schools, churches and organizations in a variety of activities including literacy events, and community book and food drives.



Tom Riggensch, Director of Y.E.S., and young bike riders take a break at Window Rock, AZ

College students have assisted in educational, mentoring and service projects on the Reservation through the **Y.E.S. Alternative Spring Break**.

Y.E.S has been involved with a lively mix of community projects across the Reservation. In the cultural sphere, the **Writer's Project** has attracted re-

known authors, and music programs have featured prominent Navajo musicians. Y.E.S. also sponsors a martial arts program, a boxing club, running events, and ropes events. Y.E.S. has also partnered with IHS in the **Adventures in Medicine** program for high school students.

Eve's Fund/ThinkFirst Navajo has co-sponsored Y.E.S. by providing bike helmets for the Tour de Rez and Chuska Challenge. We have also sponsored Tour de Rez by supporting riderships for 10 riders.

Eve's Fund Partners with Red Eagle Challenge to Boost Hope for Youth

Red Eagle Challenge offers outdoor experiential adventures to foster self-esteem, team-work, hope and wellness for youth at risk. We provided grant-writer support, supplied by Suzanne Jamison, to help Director Orlando Piocche prepare a grant application to the Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation. The grant was funded and permitted the purchase of new kayaks which makes possible the inclusion of families with young participants on river trips.

In addition, Eve's Fund supported the building of an indoor climbing wall to enable RCE participants to climb during inclement weather conditions.

Eve's Fund Promotes Bike Safety with Helmets and Billboard

Last year, Eve's Fund/ThinkFirst Navajo gave away about 300 helmets and sold about 100 at our cost, \$5 per helmet. About 150 helmets went to riders on the Tour de Rez and Chuska Challenge, events sponsored by Y.E.S. under Tom Riggensch. About 150 went to the Red Eagle Challenge, through Lanier Nabahe for bike rodeos. The remainder were given away or sold by Precious Life. We also sponsored a roadside billboard near Gallup promoting helmet use. Reflective stickers bearing the ThinkFirst logo were attached to most of the helmets.

Presentations by Voices for Injury Prevention Reach 3,000 Students

During 2007-2008, VIPs Arthur Hardy and Cecelia Fred made presentations to students ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade in primary, middle and high schools all over the Navajo Nation. The total number of students reached was about 3,000. Our VIPs speak out strongly about their own injuries and about ways to prevent injuries. To remind students of the principles of injury prevention, VIPs presented them with thousands of incentives, mostly reflective stickers to be applied to sneakers or helmets, and also some wrist bands and pencils, all bearing the ThinkFirst logo.

Executive Director Hardy joined Darlene Begay and Tonilisa Nezz of Navajo Coordinated School Health in training two new VIPs who will soon give VIP presentations.

PROJECT HEAD & HEART Offers Comprehensive Character Education

Zonnie Gorman, Director of the Circle of Light Navajo Educational Project, is launching an exciting program of character education to enhance self-identity, self-esteem and motivation among Navajo youth. An innovative **Traveling Exhibition** will present a dozen outstanding Navajo role models. **Community Impact Projects** will re-engage youth in service endeavors to

assist the community while enhancing character in the youth. **Character Exploration** will utilize role play and peer interaction to balance head and heart and thus practice the Navajo philosophy of Hozho. A broad **Curriculum** will be developed with the Navajo Nation Education Department.

Eve's Fund has supported Project Head & Heart through grant-writing services and direct donation.

PLANS FOR 2008-2009

Promotion of Hope and Wellness

- Return of the Magic Tree House team, with auditorium presentations and writing work-shops
- Consider further rounds of H.O.P.E. training to prevent suicide
- Possible Y.E.S. presentation on outdoor adventures and wellness; consider further support for Tour de Rez riders
- Continued distribution of bike helmets through Y.E.S. and Red Eagle Challenge
- Renewal application is being prepared by Red Eagle Challenge for grant from Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation.
- Consider support for Project Head & Heart
- VIP presentations, bolstered by addition of new VIPs
- Possible Youth Film Festival, with opening presentation by outstanding film-maker, followed by film work-shops for Navajo youth

Fund-raising

- Energetic application to Southwestern foundations for support; focus on hope and wellness fostered by uplifting speakers and programs
- Annual benefit event
- Annual donations (continuing and new)

PLEASE HELP USE SAVE NAVAJO LIVES.

Any contribution you make, at any level, will help promote Hope and Wellness, and decrease disabling and fetal injuries to Navajo people. Many thanks for your help.

We are trying to make Eve's Fund/ThinkFirst Navajo as green as possible. In this effort, email distribution of information saves trees. May we have your email address to minimize our paper footprint? Thank you!

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