

Gallup woman named VIP of the year

GALLUP – Gallup resident Cecelia Fred was named Voice for Injury Prevention of the year by the ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation in New Orleans on April 28, according to a ThinkFirst news release.

The VIP of the Year honors exceptional speakers who promote the mission and programs of ThinkFirst by reaching beyond the classroom to assume additional roles of leadership.

For the past 13 years, Fred has been a speaker with ThinkFirst Navajo's injury prevention education program, one of 146 U.S. chapters and the only one on a reservation.

"At the age of six, most Navajo children of Cecelia Fred's generation were running, playing, and herding sheep," states the award presentation. "Cecelia, however, was in a wheelchair, paralyzed by a stray bullet from a gun her uncle

was cleaning in the next room."

Colleagues who nominated Fred asked the national organization to consider questions including, How does a small child with a spinal cord injury living in the Navajo region stay alive and positive for decades to come?

How does a Navajo woman living in severe poverty with inadequate housing, little education, limited transportation, restricted health care and poor nutrition survive, raise two wonderful boys, and become a recognized advocate for people with disabilities and an injury prevention education leader?

Cecelia not only survived these challenges, she thrived, according to her colleagues.

When neurosurgeon Dr. Robert Crowell was trying to launch a ThinkFirst chapter on the Navajo Nation, Fred helped make it happen.

She convinced Navajo elders that too many Navajo children were dying and getting injured and it didn't need to happen. She travelled many miles across the Navajo Nation, in her very old car, to take Crowell to schools that were receptive to hosting ThinkFirst presentations.

On several occasions she had to rent a car and stow her wheelchair in the trunk just to make sure she would arrive safe and on time to deliver a school presentation.

As a result of Fred's advocacy work, ThinkFirst Navajo has received three Quality of Life Grants from the Reeve Foundation.

For the past nine years, Cecelia has served on the Native American Disability Law Center board.

Her ongoing service attracted the Con Alma Health Care Foundation to award a \$10,800 grant to expand the ThinkFirst Navajo program.

Fred works several days a week as an advocate and independent living specialist at the San Juan Center for Independence in Gallup. In this role, she spearheaded the creation of a women's group to talk about issues related to their disabilities.

Since ThinkFirst Navajo was started by Eve's Fund for Native American Health Initiatives in late 2005, its VIP speakers — all adult Navajos with paraplegia — have educated more than 50,000 Navajo school children.

Information: evesfund.org.

Cecelia Fred, seated, receives the Voice for Injury Prevention of the Year award on April 28 in New Orleans. She is shown with Barbara Crowell Roy, left, president of Eve's Fund, and Jodee Dennison, ThinkFirst Navajo Chapter director.



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