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Embrace Mother Nature to Get Fit

WINDOW ROCK, AZ. – Embrace Mother Nature.

That’s how Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye wants everyone to begin their new year.

“God has blessed the Navajo Nation with one of the most beautiful scenic places in the world,” Begaye stated. “Mother Nature has carved out magnificent rock formations within our four sacred mountains so we need to go outside and enjoy our great outdoors.”

The Navajo Nation is working collaboratively with navajoyes.org to launch a series of running events and other outdoor recreation activities throughout the Navajo Nation this year.

“If you take care of your bodies, you will live a long life,” Begaye noted. “You don’t have to run, you can also walk. There’s nothing like enjoying our great outdoors with your family and friends. I am strongly encouraging the Navajo people to live a healthy lifestyle, which begins with exercising. This in turn will help you have a healthy mind and spirit.”

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez who once weighed more than 300 pounds has made an about face and is walking the talk – he began running in the year 2012 and is a new man so to speak. He said it was a comment from a Navajo youth who inspired him to re-evaluate himself and begin practicing what he preaches.

“I use to hate running, but now, I enjoy running,” Nez commented.

Today, Nez has run several half marathons, marathons and even a first-ever 50-mile marathon at Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park in early 2015.



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Echoing Begaye's comments, Nez said, "President Begaye and I are promoting healthy living and tourism on the Navajo Nation. We have many visitors who come to our tribal parks, but we don't have that many Navajo people visiting our parks. We want to show the younger generation that we have beautiful parks in their own backyard. We are working to develop events in places that most people can't normally see. We are committed to good health."

Nez is working with Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation, Navajoyes.org CEO Tom Riggerbach, the Navajo Nation Division of Health and other entities throughout the Navajo Nation to plan and develop new outdoor recreation activities not only for the Navajo people, but for visitors.

"My motto is to never leave anyone behind," Nez explained. "I always encourage runners that they can do it...that's what we do as runners. And that's what I want to do today. President Begaye and I want to encourage the Navajo people to begin steps to living healthy."

As a result of their collaborated efforts, a Navajo Nation Park Race Series was developed, which included three running events last year. In the year 2106, it will begin with a marathon, half marathon and kids run at Little Colorado River Gorge on February 6th. The adventure begins at 10 a.m.

Other 2016 scheduled events include the Shiprock Marathon on May 6-7th; Navajo Code Talker 29K on August 14th; Asaayi Mountain Run on September 10th; Four Corners Marathon on October 6-10th; Rainbow Bridge Trail Ultra on November 19th and Monument Valley Marathon on December 12th.

Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department Manager Martin L. Begaye said, "We are very excited to launch and promote a series of new events and activities on the Navajo Nation, which are geared toward the Navajo people and guests who visit our tribal parks. The events that were held last year were very successful. We look forward to an even better year in the year 2016. I want to commend all the people who work diligently behind the scenes to make these events come into fruition."



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Nez encouraged the Navajo people to reframe their resolution and reinvest in themselves. He said his new plan for the year 2016 also includes the development of a new Navajo Nation Wellness Policy that will allow tribal employees to exercise during their workday.

“Tribal employees will no longer only have to exercise during their lunch hour. We want to develop new venues to live a healthy lifestyle because we want a healthy and strong nation. Studies show that exercise relieves stress and it will cut health care costs of the Navajo Nation,” Nez explained.

Navajoyes.org CEO Tom Riggensch said the year 2015 was an empowering journey not only for the runners, but for all the people who worked tirelessly to endure the changing climate and terrain.

Riggensch who is also an avid runner noted, “Part of the Navajo Park Race Series was built on a great Navajo running tradition. We wanted to develop a health challenge, which is a positive way to address this issue. The Navajo Nation has some of the most beautiful lands in the world. It is truly a magical place, which is why we had so many runners from Europe at our Monument Valley Marathon last year. ”

He explained that at Little Colorado Gorge, intrepid globe trotters and locals will have an opportunity to view and experience 2,000 vertical feet into the canyon then run into a peaceful course of old and new trails.

For more information about how to register for the Little Colorado Gorge Event and other events, contact www.navajoyes.org or contact Riggensch at (928) 429-0345.