



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Former Diné College President Returns For Speaker Series

Lewis: 'I Am Very Privileged And Honored To Have Been Here'

TSAILE, Ariz. — When it came to making arrangements for the Navajo Community College/Diné College Speaker Series, organizer Miranda Haskie, Ed.D, didn't have to look very far.

One of their own is an administrator with the Navajo Nation and member of the Board of Regents at Diné College. It was a decision that Dilkon, Ariz., native Tommy Lewis, Ed.D, made instantaneously.

"We're very happy to have Dr. Lewis as a speaker," Haskie, a sociology professor at the College, said. "He has had an association with Diné College for many years."

Lewis gave a talk Jan. 30 about the history and challenges of the College during the 1990s. He was president from 1993 to 2000 and after Augustine Martinez resigned the post.

"Navajo Community College/Diné College put a mark out there for everyone to recognize," Lewis told about 50 audience members. "I am very privileged and honored to have been here."

Although Lewis left the president's position at Diné College in 2000, he said he still has fond memories of the College's "people and leaders who were instrumental in serving Diné College." And the students and instructors who've graced the College over the years remain an important part of what represents the core of Diné College, Lewis said.

Lewis mentioned people like Robert Roessel, Yazzie Begay, Charlie Benally, Guy Gorman, Peter McDonald and Peterson Zah, among others, noting that Roessel was a founding member of the College and its first president. McDonald, a former chairman of the Navajo Nation, put together the first Board of Regents at the College and was instrumental in securing some of its early funding.

Monty Roessel is the current president of Diné College and the son of the first president. Lewis oversaw the name change from Navajo Community College, which was prompted by the College's offering of baccalaureate degrees.

"There are now six baccalaureate programs in 50 years," Lewis mused. "That's a tremendous accomplishment," he said, noting the College's myriad of coursework in Navajo language and culture.

“I knew a lot of these people,” Lewis said of the early leaders. “They were good people. People who were looking and thinking years ahead.”

Honorary Degrees

Lewis mentioned the honorary degrees awarded to Wilson Aronilth, Margaret Thomas and the late Phil Bluehouse. A highlight in the history of the College was a visit by former president Bill Clinton in 2000 — believed to be Clinton’s first to a tribal-controlled institution.

A Northern Arizona University doctoral graduate and the current Director of the Department of Diné Education on the Navajo Nation, Lewis recalled times when he’d come to the Tsaile campus as a youngster. His 55-minute speech was partly done in Navajo.

Lewis possesses some 40 years of experience in education and has held senior level position working with schools, colleges and universities at the local, state and national levels.

The speaker series is part of the events offered by Diné College in 2018 and in celebration of its 50th anniversary, Haskie said.