LeChe’e Chapter hosts Traditional Weekend

By Phil Clark
Youth of the LeChe’e community, parents, grandparents, other community members and visitors gathered at the LeChe’e Chapter House on the Navajo Nation next to Page. On June 9 and 10, 2023, the Chapter organized a variety of activities for the children in the Summer Youth Program to learn traditional skills. Almost 100 people participated and watched. This is the first such event of this kind for the Chapter and more are planned in the future.

The event coincided with the June 1 “Treaty Day” commemorating the day, in 1868, when a treaty was signed after the Long Walk, ending conflict between the US Government and the Navajo people, or the ‘Dine’.

The clear, sunny morning started with the butchering of the first of two sheep that were then prepared in the traditional manner. Adults mentored the children. All of the sheep parts are used either for food or clothing. The mutton meat was prepared for barbecues. Tripe was cleaned and twisted on itself and grilled. Blood and organs were mixed with potatoes to make a sauce.

The women of the community worked on different tables to prepare for the barbecue. Assistant Speaker with Navajo Council said, “This is traditionally women’s work.” The only man involved with the preparation of the meat was a man who used a modern electric saw to cut the spine into smaller pieces.

By Saturday morning, the cake was made and served with fry bread and tortillas. While the meat was being prepared, another group of women and children prepared Navajo cake. The cake is traditionally made as part of the Kinizhda ceremony. The Kinizhda ceremony is held when a girl comes of age. Secondary and main branches are held together with a string and is used to stir and thoroughly mix white corn meal, ground wheat or wheat germ, brown sugar and boiling water. The batter is traditionally poured in a bowl-shaped depression in the ground, lined with burlap sacks and covered with a layer of corn husks. The batter is then covered with another layer of corn husks and burlap. A layer of sand covers the burlap and hot coals are placed on top until the cake is done in the morning. At the event, aluminum pans were lined with corn husks, filled with batter and covered with corn husks again before being covered with sand and coals. By Saturday morning, the cake was removed from the coals and shared with people who arrived at the Chapter House.

Other activities included watching the movie “Nemo” in Navajo and a movie about the Long Walk. Children received books in Navajo to help them learn the language and gift baskets from a local discount store. One of the adults read to the children in Navajo.

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A child examines the sheep skins and hooves.

Adults and children pose before eating Navajo cake.

Two women prepare batter for Navajo cake.

A young lady learns to prepare mutton for the grill.

Navajo cake pans are placed in the traditional wood fire.

A young lady harvests Navajo tea.

Coals and wood are placed on the sand to cook the Navajo cakes.

A layer of sand is placed on top of the cake pans.

Batter for Navajo cake is being readied to pour in the cooking pans.

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