A4 THURSDAY, MARCH 07, 2019 NAVAJO TIMES

Women gather at Roundhouse to honor murdered, missing; demand action



SPECIAL TO THE TIMES | COLLEEN KEANE

Valya Cisco and her three young children from Oak Springs, Ariz., during the New Mexico Legislature's Indigenous Women's Day on March 1, which honored Valya's sister, Katczinzki Ariel Begay, who was murdered in 2017.



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Ten-year-old Sage DeVore, Jemez, holds up a Pueblo Action Alliance workshop flyer during Indigenous Women's Day on March 1. Her aunt, Reyes DeVore, left, and another advocate stand beside her in the lobby of the



Prevention and Treatment professionals, teachers, youth activity coaches, parents and all community members are invited to a training event and discussion of the local effects of opioid use and abuse, and local strategies for prevention and treatment.

Lunch will be served.

Area Physicians, Counselors, Cultural Counselors and Persons In Recovery will present on topics including Medication Assisted Treatment, Detoxification, Residential and Outpatient Treatment, and the role of Self-help and Cultural Interventions.

NRGANI7FRS

Diné Council of Elders for Peace and Synergy Behavioral Health Center

Noreen Kelly Phone: 505-870-6701 noreenkellymcsd@gmail.com



9:00 AM - 4:00 PM MST

TIME

LOCATION

87311

New address

Gallup Downtown

Conference Center

204 West Coal Street

Gallup, New Mexico

'Which one of us is next?'

BY COLLEEN KEANE SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

SANTA FE, N.M. – Along with other messages to Indigenous women who've been lost, a message to Anna Mae Aquash was penned in white on a red sheet of poster paper during the New Mexico Legislature's first Indigenous Women's Day on March 1

"Never Forgotten," wrote Szya and Niquita.

The message to Aquash stood out because it brings attention to the fact that the epidemic of murdered and missing indigenous women has been allowed to go on for a very long time.

Aquash, a Mi'kmaq activist from Canada's First Nations, also known as Brave Hearted Woman, was murdered on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in the winter of 1975, more than 40 years ago.

"The epidemic has been decades long and without acknowledgement," exclaimed Amber Morning Star Byars, Choctaw/Chickasaw, in her address in the Roundhouse's rotunda.

She advised her audience, made up mostly of women and girls from the Navajo Nation, Pueblos and Apache nations, that Native women are 10 times more at risk of being murdered than any other group of women.

Remembering some of the murder victims, Byars read the names of dozens of indigenous women.

Among them were Loreal Tsingine, Ashley Heavy Runner, Audrey Willis, Ashlynn Mike, Julia Vicente, Melanie Marie James, Denet Webb, Samantha Begay and Katczinzki Ariel Begay.

Katczinzki Ariel Begay's younger sister, Valya Cisco, Diné, from Oak Springs, Arizona, brought her three young children to the event.

Valya said Ariel went missing the first week of July 2017. Her body was found three months later.

"I'm here to honor her," said Valva.

New Mexico, Washington and Arizona have the highest number of known disappearances and homicides of indigenous women in the country, according to Byars, who cited data collected by the Urban Indian Health Institute of the Seattle Indian Center.

"Which one of us is next?" she

"Unless we do something collectively to stop it, it will always be allowed," Byars said.

Several grassroots organiza-

tions have mobilized to meet the challenge and increase their impact. Among them are the Three Sisters Collective, Tewa Women United and Pueblo Action Alliance.

"These are our sisters, our people who are going missing," said Reyes DeVore, co-director and outreach coordinator for Pueblo Action Alliance. "So it's the community that feels these tragedies and has to go through that loss. It's really important that we empower them, so they don't feel like they can't do anything."

DeVore brought her 10-year old niece, Sage DeVore, who helped pass out information at the alliance's table.

DeVore said that the alliance conducts workshops about how to become active and stay true to traditional indigenous values while cultivating resistance.

"Within those workshops there's a lot of time to reflect, discuss and learn from each other," she said. "We value that everyone carries their own indigenous knowledge. There's power in the people."

Upon request, Pueblo Action Alliance will go to any community to hold a workshop.

At the Three Sisters Collective table, Autumn Gomez, Taos/Comanche, encouraged people to participate in the community art project where messages to Anna Mae Aquash and other missing and murdered indigenous women and girls were written.

Seeing the colorful paper and pens, Valya Cisco helped her young son and daughter write a message to their beloved aunt, Katczinzki Ariel Begay.

As another way to reach out to youth, Gomez passed out dozens of 'zines – artistically designed booklets with text and images promoting safety and community involvement.

"Information is powerful!" she said, turning over the 'zine to show it had an anti-copyright stamp, one example of decolonizing, she said.

"We need to decolonize our relationship to each other," she said. "Know who your neighbors are. Visit your elders. Take care of younger people. Support each other. That's how our communities have stayed so strong."

On the other side of the Roundhouse lobby, Nathana Bird from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo was handing out 'zines that gave youth information on sexual health, wellness, selfcare and safety.

"Zines are attractive to young people because they are

a little bit more creative than brochures and other handouts," she said.

Attendees of the Indigenous
Women's Day were also encouraged to support state and

federal bills

Senate Memorial 38, sponsored by Sen. John Pinto, D-McKinley-San Juan, recognizes Congresswomen Deb Haaland's push for a national investigation along with data collection and accountability.

"No more stolen sisters!" said Haaland, in a relayed message through her spokesperson Sophia Sanchez. "These injustices cannot continue any longer. I applaud those who are doing the work every day to put an end to the silence of our stolen sisters."

Senate Bill 453, sponsored by Sen. Linda Lopez, D-Bernallilo, proposes to establish statewide databases, explore best practices to search for missing persons on tribal lands and ensure access to culturally appropriate victim services.

House Bill 278 would provide \$100,000 to create a task force, collaborate with tribal law enforcement, identify barriers and create partnerships.

Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove/Toadlena-Two Grey Hills/Red Valley/Tse'alnaozt'i'i'/Sheepsprings/Beclabito/Gadiiahi-To'Koi) testified to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in December and brought attention to the immense sorrow of Katczinzki Ariel's family and numerous others who have lost loved ones.

"They have family members who are grieving, grandmothers who are praying just to hear anything about what happened to their relative," she

Crotty and other advocates are pushing federal legislators for the passage of Savannah's Act (S. 1942), which sets up national databases, and the Survive Act (S. 1870), which provides funding for victims.

The New Mexico legislative session ends March 16 at noon. The third annual healing

circle focusing on the crises of MMIW will be held April 27 at El Chante Casa de Cultura (804 Park Ave. SW) in downtown Albuquerque.

Information: #VAWA4M

Information: #VAWA4M-MIW, nmlegis.gov, csvanw.org, threesisterscollective.org. Find Three Sisters Collective, TEWA Women United and Pueblo Action Alliance on Facebook along with links to other community action groups.



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