

Indian tribes, government learn value of partnering for transportation

Encouraging a culture of partnering between the 22 Native American Tribes in Arizona and governmental agencies, ADOT Director Victor Mendez told the Tribal Transportation Forum and Safety Summit that, “Partnerships don’t just happen without leadership.”

He challenged the leaders of tribes and government to work together to address common transportation interests. “Governor Janet Napolitano has set a high priority on tribal issues of transportation, health, and education,” Mendez said. “In 2004, the governor initiated GTSAC (Governor’s Traffic Safety Advisory Council) with focus on all public roads, not just state highways. Safety remains a high priority,” he said.

The council serves as a role model for developing, promoting and implementing cost effective traffic safety strategies within the state transportation system.

Mendez told the 125 attendees that in February, 2008, his office established the Safety Engineering System within ADOT. He introduced Reed Henry, who coordinates the Arizona Strategic Highway Safety Plan in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety, Department of Health, and the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety.

“We also initiated the Road Safety Audit system to study high-accident locations,” Mendez said, introducing Mike Blankenship who has been

assigned to assess the causes of traffic crashes and recommend mitigation measures to reduce accident statistics.

Matt Carpenter, program manager for ADOT’s Multimodal Planning Division led a discussion on Rural Tribal Transportation Needs.

Tribal safety initiatives discussed included:

Sobriety Checkpoints and DUI Enforcement – Christine Reede, San Carlos Apache Tribe.

Safety Belts – Priscilla Lopez, Tohono O’odham Nation; Kateri Goseyun, White Mountain Apache Tribe; and Jesse Delmar, Yavapai-Apache Nation.

Safe Routes to School – Robert Mills, Yavapai-Apache Nation.

Don Sneed, tribal liaison for the Multimodal Planning Division, presented an overview of an ADOT research project entitled Building Tribal Traffic Safety.

The conference was held May 13-15 at the Francisco Grande Hotel and Resort in Casa Grande.

MVD officer praised

(Concluded from Page 7)

Huffaker, who has been assigned to the Motor Vehicle Division’s port of entry at San Simon in southeastern Arizona for nearly two years, sees hundreds of trucks go through his bay every shift. He wonders if one of those truckers he has screened in the past might have been Mary VanPopering. What he does know for sure, is that when she passes through the port again, they will recognize each other from the day they met alongside I-10.

Expressing her gratitude for Huffaker’s assistance, VanPopering sent a letter to the Motor Vehicle Division, calling Officer Huffaker “A great Samaritan. . . If Marvin Huffaker would not have stopped, all three units would have burned. He saved our company many thousands of dollars in equipment and that’s not including the valuable products in the front trailer. He was very brave. He never hesitated . . . I am so grateful for his help. I have thanked God for his help! Yes, there are angels on the highway! That angel is Marvin,” she wrote.

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