

NATIVE AMERICAN *and* ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE MONTH

At RNDC, we offer an inclusive and strong family culture that respects the diversity of our associates and business partners. This month, Native American and Alaska Native Heritage Month, is a time to celebrate rich and diverse cultures and traditions and to acknowledge the important contributions of America's Native people.

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Location: Phoenix, Arizona
Hire Date: November 2018



How do you celebrate Native American and Alaska Native Heritage Month?

On the Navajo Reservation we have what we call "The Navajo Nation Fair." During the fair, we have a long week of events like meeting the new Miss Navajo, frybread contest, parades, baby contest, powwows, rodeos and vendors cooking up traditional foods. Everyone from the reservation and visiting tribes participate.

Why is your heritage important to you?

I am fortunate to have grown up on the Navajo reservation from birth until I graduated from high school. Growing up as a Navajo woman on the reservation, my family taught me a lot about appreciating life, being hardworking and strong minded, and never being ashamed of who I am or where I come from. I remember when I was a child, my mom would wake me and my sister early in the morning to go get our corn pollen and pray to the east before sunrise. She would tell us that holy people are flying over so we should say our prayers and give thanks with the corn pollen "tádídíín" (food for the holy people) as an offering to them. In the Navajo culture, family and traditions mean everything.

Do you hold any traditions that have been repeated over generations?

We have many traditions, but the one we celebrate the most is called a Kinaaldá, a coming of age ceremony for women. It is a sacred four-day ceremony that takes a lot of hard work. The purpose of this ceremony is to welcome girls into womanhood and to teach them about being strong and hardworking.

I come from a family of Navajo women. Navajo women hold a strong position, they keep the family together and preserve our culture and traditions. We want our kids and future generations to have a positive and bright future.

What do you wish people knew about Native American and Alaska Native Heritage?

I wish the history of all Native Americans was taught more. There are so many tribes with interesting cultures and traditions. When you have conversations with elders you hear and learn so many interesting stories of where they came from, the struggles they went through, the lifestyles they live as Native Americans and how they overcame adversity.