



The theme for this year's Navajo Rug Show is Weaving World Peace. All proceeds go to support the native elders and their work.



*In old age wandering on a  
trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a  
trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.  
My words will be beautiful.*

—FROM A NAVAJO BLESSING

People stream into the living room of Linda Myers's Park City home each November. They are elderly women—mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, along with the family members who accompany them here. After driving for hours from remote and distant reaches of a Navajo reservation hundreds of miles south of here,

they are tired but eager to see each other. Greetings are offered, more chairs are brought in as the room fills up, and information is quickly exchanged about lodging for the next few days and the location of the evening meal.

These families come to Park City to participate in the Navajo Rug Show, held annually on the first weekend of November at Deer Valley Resort's

Snow Park Lodge and sponsored by the Adopt-A-Native-Elder (ANE) program. As with any well-planned event, a beehive of activity roils behind a veneer of seeming calm. "To host 30 Navajo families from the reservation, we have to find 30 places for them to stay and provide food for four days," says Myers, co-founder and director of ANE. "Condos are donated, Deer Valley provides the facility, and it takes 200 volunteers to manage the show. People work year-round to make it happen."

In addition to the weekend sale of rugs, jewelry and crafts, from which all proceeds go directly to the Navajo artists, show attendees are treated to weaving demonstrations, ceremonial dances and entertainment, and a fundraising live auction. The idea for this year's show theme, Weaving World Peace, arose at the 2009 event during an activity called Native American

Idol Contest, an improvised singing competition. One of the weavers who sang about her desire for world peace touched Myers's heart, and she asked the elders if they would like to adopt the theme of world peace for 2010. With an enthusiastic "yes," weavers immediately began to prepare rugs that symbolically represent the concept. As early as January, small rugs began arriving—one with clasped hands woven into the textile, one with arrow points touching each other to symbolize an end to fighting and another with doves flying into a tree of life.

Each weaver determines her own prices for her rugs based on her financial needs. Ruth Benally, an 87-year-old weaver from Big Mountain, Ariz., says the money she earns from weaving buys firewood, hay for her animals and fuel for her Jeep Cherokee. Benally lives independently in the traditional way, keeping 36 cattle, 58 sheep and 28 horses. She learned to weave by help-



ing her mother and aunt until she was about 13 years old, when she started making her own rugs.

Benally was one of the first weavers to participate in the ANE program, now at 20 years in operation and counting, and is a respected spiritual leader. According to her friend Grace Smith Yellow Hammer, "She is a medicine woman and does spiritual healing, especially with veterans. She knows a

lot of things about our traditional way. She's a leader in Big Mountain, and the community has respect for her and depends on her for spiritual advice. It's hard to walk in her moccasins."

Yellow Hammer, the co-founder of ANE, grew up in the Teesto community near Winslow, Ariz. Her relatives were recognized medicine people, and community members asked Yellow Ham-

**'People will adopt an elder, then want to go out to the land to meet them.'**

mer to return to her homeland from California, where she had relocated. "I knew about the traditional way of life. My grandmother and mother were both spiritual healers, and a lot of people knew my family. When I first met with the elders, the women were not weaving anymore. They had a lot



*Image by Michael Fatali  
of Fatali Gallery  
"Earth Spirit Rising"*



The Navajo Rug Show also includes music (at right), ceremonial dances, a powwow, storytelling, weaving demonstrations (opposite page) and more.

of knowledge in designing but had lost interest because of land disputes that disrupted their traditional ways. Many children had lost the [traditional] language, and the elders were losing ground, too. Some of our people had relocated and lost their homes.”

Yellow Hammer, herself a skilled weaver, knew somebody at Salt Lake City Community College and was invited to sell some rugs there. “That’s where I met Linda Myers. Then she came to the reservation and said she wanted to help.”

Out of this alliance, ANE was born. “It’s been a lot of hard work,” says Yellow Hammer. “But we have become so big now. It’s a great thing that happens.” Funding for the organization, which comes from grants, individual donations, door money and the auction



at the rug sale, helps to buy \$10,000 worth of yarn given annually to the elders so they can continue to weave.

The annual rug show is the most visible of the many activities undertaken by ANE. Among other programs are Walk in Beauty, which addresses schoolchildren’s need for new shoes and school supplies, and biannual food runs, which supply 1,300 tons of food and medicine to more than 500 elders living in 11 areas of the Navajo reservation. Navajo coordinators from senior

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about the Adopt-A-Native-Elder program and the Navajo Rug Show, visit [anelder.org](http://anelder.org) or e-mail [mail@anelder.org](mailto:mail@anelder.org).

and community centers help identify individual needs. Deliveries to the reservation are made in person, and in addition to a caravan of trucks, volunteers “load their vehicles with food boxes, medical supplies and clothing,” Myers says. “It’s a very hands-on experience. People will adopt an elder, then want to go out to the land to meet them.”

Above all, Myers expresses her appreciation for the friendships she has made through ANE. “We’ve put 20 years into building these special relationships with the warmest and most incredible people,” she says. [PCM](#)

*Writer/photographer Sedona Callahan will never forget the beautiful people she met while conducting interviews for this article.*

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# Artist’s Reception



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