

Fighting for Home: A Navajo Code Talker's Legacy of Family, Food, and Community

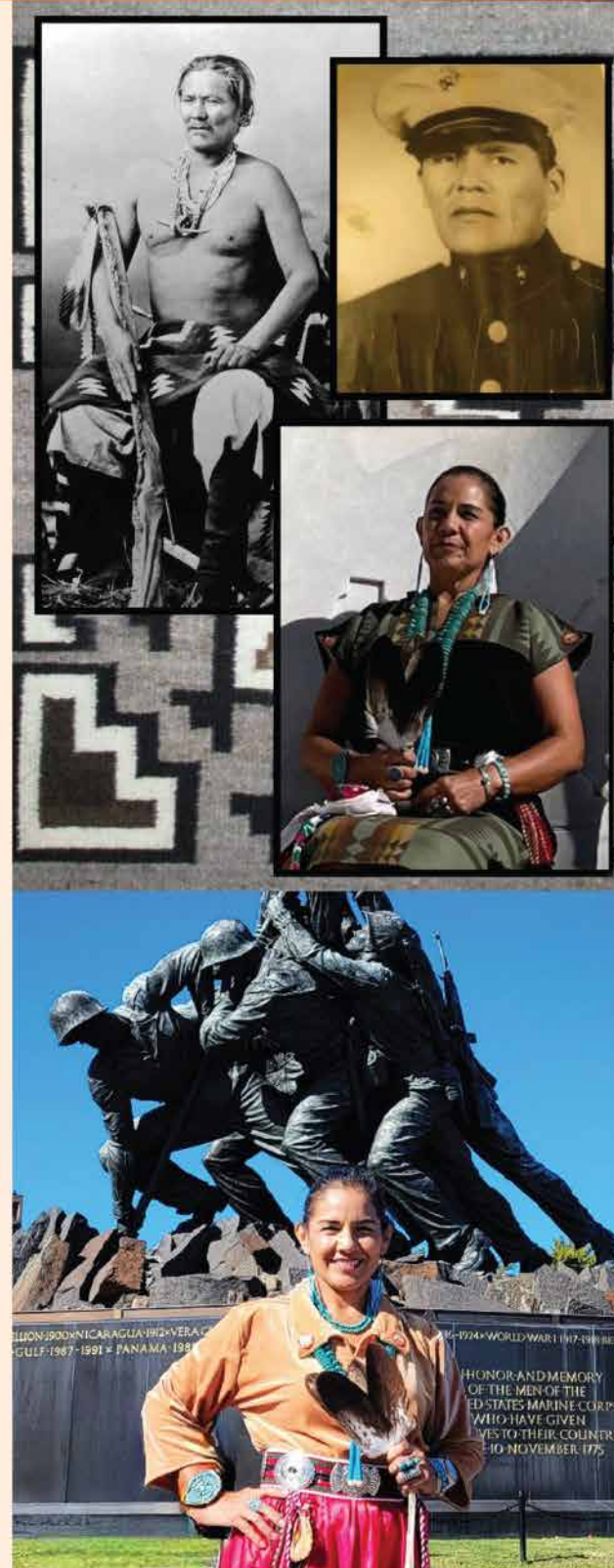
Navajo Code Talker James C. Manuelito Sr. USMC., a father, grandfather, food grower, protector of the land, and U.S. Marine, was Dawn Manuelito's great-grandfather. **James was one of the honorable 400 Navajo (Diné) Marines who developed an unbreakable code based on the Navajo language that was critical during World War II.** We learned about his legacy from our conversations with Dawn Manuelito, who these days is involved in helping shape the Arizona food system.

Dawn, who is of both Navajo (Diné) and Apache ancestry, grew up preparing the fields on the Navajo Nation alongside her great-grandfather. She describes him as a "warrior at home and a provider" for their entire family and community. **Food sovereignty was a way of life.** When Dawn was a child, the family ran livestock, hunted, foraged, and grew the majority of their food, with commodities supplementing some of their needs. "Now, food systems are so different," says Dawn.

As a Native American veteran living on the Reservation, James could not easily access military benefits, if at all. But he came back ready to get to work on the land he fought to protect. He loved growing food so much that some of his produce (melons and squash) won blue ribbons at the Navajo Nation Fair — something he was very proud of.

For James, "fighting for our homelands was fighting for our food system — our water sources, food sources, the air, and all the blessings we have been given," says Dawn.

James' legacy of family, food, and taking care of each other — K'é — lives on in Dawn, and we are so grateful to her for sharing his story with us.



AmeriCorps VISTA and Veteran: Meet Priscilla Denetdeel-Yildir

Priscilla Denetdeel-Yildir retired at the rank of Chief Master Sergeant of the United States Air Force, which is the highest enlisted rank in the Air Force. In fact, this made her **the first female Native American promoted to this rank** — an amazing feat!

After serving four years in the U.S. Air Force, she joined the Arizona Air National Guard, where she served the next 34 years. Upon retirement from the military, she accepted employment with Camp Navajo, Flagstaff, Arizona, and it was during this time she started volunteering at her church food pantry on weekends and saw the great need. Once Priscilla officially retired, she knew she wanted to do more.

Priscilla is currently serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA at the Short Creek Dream Center's City Help Center Food Bank in Colorado City, Arizona, as their Volunteer Development Coordinator. Her focus is to create a stronger volunteer structure for the organization. AzFBN's AmeriCorps VISTA program supports VISTAs like Priscilla, serving throughout Arizona in pantries, food banks, and other hunger-fighting partners to help them build capacity during a one-year term.

Always obliged to serve and proud to perform her military duties, Priscilla was recruited as a member of the twin cities, Colorado City, Arizona, and Hildale, Utah, military honor guard. She has participated in three opening ceremonies of flag raising in the local community.

We are incredibly lucky to have people with such amazing knowledge, accolades, and life experiences serve in this program. Priscilla's skills and expertise bring invaluable support to her organization and community of advocates fighting hunger and strengthening her community.

Interested in serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA? Check out our page, azfoodbanks.org/azfbn-programs/ameri-corps-vista-program/.





The Upcoming Farm Bill Impacts All of Us

Have you heard about the Farm Bill? Now is the time to get up to speed. The Farm Bill is a federal bipartisan package of bills that impacts the U.S. agriculture sector in many ways — from farm livelihoods and crop insurance to emergency food assistance programs and rural development. The Farm Bill is negotiated and reauthorized by Congress every five years. It is considered the backbone of our national food assistance programs and farm policy. And it's “only” 530 pages long!

In 2022, AzFBN member food banks — Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, HonorHealth Desert Mission Food Bank, St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance, United Food Bank, and Yuma Community Food Bank — collectively distributed 172 million pounds of food. That is enough food to fill 3,308 semi-trailers!

Yet, 798,790 adults and 269,640 children remain food insecure in Arizona. For food banks, food pantries, anti-hunger organizations, and community advocates, this bill is essential in helping meet the needs of food-insecure Arizonans. Dig into some of the programs that are impacted by this bill:

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps
 - As the country's most effective anti-hunger program, SNAP helped an average of 872,000 Arizonans each month in 2022, more than two-thirds of them children, older adults, and people living with disabilities.
 - SNAP brought \$2.74 million per month into Arizona's local economy in 2022.
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
 - This program connects U.S. food growers with food banks and supports transportation of produce and other essential items, like meat products and dairy, to ensure food banks are equipped to meet the needs of their community.
 - In 2022, more than 64 million pounds of TEFAP foods were distributed across Arizona.

With inflation, the cost of food is still high, and we are seeing an increase in the number of people turning to food banks for help every month. Many people are still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Farm Bill is critical in ensuring that nutrition programs are available to those who need it, as Arizona's emergency food system cannot meet this growing demand alone.

Learn more about the policy priorities we are supporting in the 2023 Farm Bill at azfoodbanks.org/farmbill.

Have questions about the Farm Bill? Reach out to Ashley St. Thomas, Director of Public Policy, at ashley@azfoodbanks.org or (857) 225-0297.



Bringing Joy to Summer Feeding

Kids have been back at school for a few months now, but it's hard to forget the challenges of this past summer; record-breaking temperatures, sky-high air-conditioning bills, high grocery prices lingering with hungry kids at home. But the crew working at summer meal sites were up and at it, serving fresh and delicious meals to kids to children of all ages.

For the past two summers, the AzFBN team has worked in partnership with Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry to implement a Summer Youth Ambassador program. Joy Covington was our talented ambassador last summer. She completed her 10-week internship the first week of August.

Over the course of her internship, she worked on three major projects: outreach to bring more families into the program, promotion to encourage them to come back, and surveys for program feedback.

Joy contacted 44 different food pantries and community organizations to assist them in promoting the summer meal program in their communities and online, as well as showing them where to find free promotional items for the program.

She visited nine summer meal sites — community centers, libraries, a pop-up site, and school sites — to provide promotional items to families, encouraging them to keep coming back and spread the word.

To bring it all together, she collected feedback from 15 summer meal sponsors in rural areas, which will help to expand and improve this program. Much of the feedback received from these locations was that flexibility, such as allowing families to pick up the meals to eat at home rather than on-site, increased the number of meals distributed.

Thanks to Joy, more kids knew where their next meal would come from over the summer, and some of these meals were shared around the family table — especially in more difficult-to-reach areas.

To learn more about the summer meals program, go to azfoodbanks.org/summer-meals/.

Want to Help?

Visit our website and subscribe to our email list. We'll send you legislative action opportunities so that our elected officials and policymakers will hear your voice!

Contact Us

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Announcing Changes to the Arizona Tax Credit

Did you know? Your donations to AzFBN qualify for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit against your state tax liability. The Arizona Department of Revenue recently announced that the **maximum credits increased from \$400 to \$421 if filing single or married and filing separately. And for married couples filing jointly that credit increased from \$800 to up to \$841.** What does that mean? Well, you can do even more with your dollars now that the credit amount has increased! Of course, check with your tax advisor to see how this might impact you.



Get the most out of your contribution toward ending hunger in Arizona by giving the full tax-credit-eligible amount today. Want to make a donation or have questions about the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit? Check out azfoodbanks.org/donate or contact Teresa Hensley, Director of Development and Marketing at teresa.hensley@azfoodbanks.org or (480) 886-6004.