

Welcome to skirt-making workshop 101

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Teaching the lost art of Diné garment-making

Gallup-McKinley County Schools Johnson-O'Malley Program hosted a workshop to all GMCS-JOM students and their parents May 19 at the Student Support Center to learn how to make skirts Diné style.

The workshop was open to students who were interested in making skirts for themselves or family members. The event which drew in over 15 participants, and was the first of its kind for area students to learn how to make traditional Diné skirts.

Johnson-O'Malley Program Director Carmen Moffett got the idea from a similar event that was held in Albuquerque at UNM.

"I thought why don't we host our own workshop, we have the funds under our program to hire two consultants to teach the students," she said. "These consultants could also teach the significance and history of the skirt, and the students would be guided on how to make the skirt. We provided all the materials and we were ready to go."

Parents were encouraged to bring their own sewing machines for this event. They worked together, cutting, measuring and learning on how to piece together the materials to create their own traditional Diné skirt under the guidance of seamstress Ruby Ashley and Erica Christie.

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Ashley, who is from Window Rock, has been a seamstress for the past 30 years, and has been teaching sewing for the past five years. Ashley took home economics class in high school, which sparked the interest in making her own clothes.

“Nowadays our young generation is always ordering skirts and trying to find people to make them for themselves,” she said. “I want them to learn how to make their own skirts so that they don’t have to go around asking people for them. Now is the time to make your own skirt.”

Christie, who is from Oak Springs, Ariz., has also been sewing for the majority of her. She remembers watching her mom and learning. She then started making clothes for her Barbie dolls and later making her own adult clothes.

This was Christie’s first workshop, and although she was feeling a little bit nervous, she was ready to teach her seamstress skills.

“I enjoy trying to teach others on how to make their own clothes,” she said. “I thought it was awesome that they had put on this workshop, especially to those here who are young ... who can carry this on when they get older.”

Along with the consultants, parents with the JOM program volunteered their time to help with the workshop.

Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves as they learned how to thread the bobbin and measurement techniques. The group talked and giggled along with the humming of the sewing machines.

Each one present was given a handout on how the existence of the Diné skirt came about, and a template on how to make their skirt. Although, mostly females were in attendance, one young boy was present as he came to learn something new.

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Eleven-year-old Rocco James from Chee Dodge Elementary was the only boy in attendance. It was curiosity that brought him to the workshop along with his mother Catherine James.

“I just got inspired on wanting to sew, so when I get older I can make my own clothes,” he said. “It’s really fun learning new stuff.”

Catherine James said it was both fun and very interesting coming to this workshop for her and her son.

“I’m really glad he’s into learning something new and having that opportunity to learn how to sew, as for myself,” she said. “It’s interesting learning the history of why as Diné women we wear the skirt and how it first started.”

The event was a hit, and each participant got to take home their creation and a little know how in how to make a traditional Diné skirt.

For more information on JOM, please call (505) 721-1036 or email cmoffett@gmcs.k12.nm.us

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