

CNIC Celebrates National American Indian Heritage Month

11/26/14

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WASHINGTON (NNS) -- WASHINGTON -Navy Installations Command (NIC) celebrated National American Indian Heritage month with an observance ceremony this week at its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Lampert, NIC's, sustainment, restoration and modernization branch action officer, served as the Master of Ceremonies for the event. Following the national anthem and invocation, Vice Adm. Dixon Smith, Commander, Navy Installations Command, introduced the guest speaker.



"We have a distinguished speaker here today who has a couple of bachelor's degrees, a couple of master's degrees and a law degree," said Smith. "What you won't find in his biography is that he got married a month ago!"

After a round of applause following the admiral's opening remarks, the guest speaker for the event, Joe Sarcinella, stepped up to the podium to share his background with the NIC staff gathered in the NIC headquarters a trium. Sarcinella is a senior advisor and liaison for Native American Affairs for the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Sarcinella opened his remarks by sharing a few facts and figures and then went on to talk about the importance of Native American service to the military.

"There are 565 federally recognized tribes in the United States," said Sarcinella. "Native Americans have the highest, per capita, service rate of any other ethnic group in the United States."

According to the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs, more than 12,000 Sailors and 1,500 civilians of Native American and Alaska Native heritage serve in the Navy.

"It is a huge honor in Indian Country to be in military service to the United States," said Sarcinella.

The rich history of Native Americans has special meaning to Sarcinella as he spoke about the theme for this year's National Native American Heritage month, "Native Pride and Spirit: Yesterday, Today and Forever."

"There was a risk of my mother losing her tribal identity," Sarcinella said, "but because her parents made certain to keep it going she continued to do the same with her children. The pride and spirit that my long past relatives had by being native became an integral part of us, that cultural fluency to be native people rather than just people that incidentally have Native American blood."

Job programs created for Native Americans were designed to get them off the reservation and get them working in mainstream America. Although Sarcinella didn't grow up in Indian Country, it was important to his mother that her children have a high level of cultural awareness and fluency. Sarcinella added that this year's theme "remains important

to always remember who you are and where you came from."

Native American Heritage Month first began with the establishment of American Indian Day by the governor of New York in May 1916, but the celebration did not gain official national recognition until President George H. W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 as "National American Indian Heritage Month." Similar proclamations under different names, including "Native American Heritage Month" and "National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month," have been issued each year since 1994.

For more information about American Indians and Alaska Natives in the Navy from the Naval History and Heritage Command, visit <http://www.history.navy.mil/special%20highlights/NativeAmerican/NativeAmerican-index.htm>. For more information about Navy shore installations visit <http://www.cnic.navy.mil>.

For more news from Commander, Navy Installations Command, visit www.navy.mil/local/cni/.