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Fleming Begaye, Sr., 47, Chinle, Arizona, a Navajo Indian, was presented the Indian Small Businessman of the Year award May 17, by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Louis R. Bruce. The ceremony took place in the auditorium of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C. as a part of Small Business Week, May 17 - 21.

As he presented the Indian Small Businessman of the Year plaque the Commissioner said: "An ex-Marine code-talker, Mr. Begaye has pyramided the small savings he began with into a complex of businesses grossing about $750.000 last year. He has provided the "Heart of Navajo land" with a modern service station, hardware, feed, auto parts, sporting goods store, general merchandise store, restaurant, an office building, and a working ranch."

Begaye's annual payroll alone is now 32 times his original investment, Commissioner Bruce pointed out, and added: "This allows him 24 full-time employees and six part-time employees. All but two are Navajo."

Peter MacDonald, Navajo Tribal Chairman, Paul Parrish, President of the Navajo Association, and John Nelson Dee, Navajo Tribal member attended the ceremonies. Bernard Kulik, Director, Office of Program Development, Office of Minority Enterprises represented the Small Business Administration.

MacDonald, With the Navajo Area Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, appointed the committee to select an Indian Small Businessman of the Year from the Navajo Area. At the ceremony, he pointed out that Begaye's special abilities enabled him to by-pass formal training and feasibility studies.

Begaye started his complex with $3.000 he saved while working for 14 years as a guidance counselor in the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school system on the Navajo Reservation. He built his first small service station, of cinderblocks, in 1960 at the junction of the Chinle-Many Farms highways where his large modern business complex now stands. His present service station is modern and has three bays.

In 1963, using profits from the service station, Begaye and his family built a general merchandise store. Again, with profits, they added a restaurant in 1964. The following year they added a hardware auto parts, and sporting goods store and in 1967 built professional offices. Begaye also has a cattle and sheep ranching business he has maintained and expanded.

The Navajo businessman was selected for his long, sustained record of success and business growth. He has one of the most extensive and well-run business enterprises on the entire Navajo Reservation, which is the size of West Virginia.

His business complex creates a large number of jobs, held largely by Indians. He has had to borrow almost no capital, and has consistently put profits back into the sound expansion of this outstanding enterprise.

His wife also a Navajo is the general manager of the Begaye business complex. Their three children also work in the enterprise.

Begaye is one of the most active people in civic affairs on the reservation. He has supplied help and information to t tribal, state, and federal agencies, and has been active in efforts to establish a branch bank in Chinle. He is also an active member of the Navajo Businessmen's Association. This Indian businessman is on the executive board of the Office of Navajo Economic Opportunity, an active member of the Chinle Planning Board, and a former member of the Chinle Public School Board.

He has contributed financial backing and goods to the Navajo Community College, Navajo Police Department, local rodeos, the community basketball teams, churches, and schools. Begaye also maintains an active interest in the Navajo Youth Baseball league.

Runners-up for the award were Clarence E. Brooks, Cherokee Indian owner and manager of Brooks Cleaners, Owasso, Oklahoma and Popovi Da San Ildefonso Pueblo, owner and operator of Popovi Da Studio, which deals in pottery, turquoise, and silver jewelry in San Ildefonso Pueblo.

Popovi Da started in business after World War II with the first GI Loan granted to an Indian in the Albuquerque area. He expanded his business to all parts of the United States and Europe by exhibits at fairs and art shows. He now has agents in Chicago and other large cities of the United States who wholesale his pottery.

Others nominated for the 8Ivard were Russell Edwin Smith, member of the Confederated Tribe’s of the Harm Springs Reservation, Oregon, owner and operator of the Russell Smith Logging Company; Ralph Perdue.

Athabascan Indian, Fairbanks, Alaska, owner and operator of a jewelry store; and Lee Thomas, Hopi Indian, owner and operator of a business complex at Orabi, Arizona which includes a laundromat, trailer park cafe, and building construction business.

Other outstanding small businessmen were Nick O. Nick, Eskimo, trading post owner and operator at Nunapitchuk, Alaska; Ralph Simon, Kickapoo Indian, owner and operator of the Simon Roofing Company, Horton, Kansas; Dr. Frank L. Enos, Shoshone, veterinarian of Landen, Wyoming near the Wind River Reservation.

Also included were: John Trottier, Sr., Turtle Mountain Chippewa who operates a turkey breeding flock operation in Benson County, North Dakota; Maynard Whitebird, Odanah, Wisconsin, member of the Bad River Tribe, owner and operator of Whitebird, Incorporated, a tool and die shop; and Leo D. Calae, member of the Rincon Band of Mission Indians, San Diego County, California, owner and operator of two Indian arts and crafts shops in California -- one in Escondido and the other in Palm Springs, California.