Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152 | Jeff McKenzie, Myron L. Rolle Foundation 646-246-2480
For Immediate Release: January 12, 2010
Print PDF

ALBUQUERQUE, NM (January 12, 2010) – U.S. Department of the Interior officials today welcomed college football All-American and Rhodes Scholar Myron Rolle to Isleta Elementary School at the Pueblo of Isleta, New Mexico, American Indian Reservation to kick off the new Our Way to Health™ Program.

A public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education and the Myron L. Rolle Foundation, the initiative brings an innovative physical fitness and health program into Bureau of Indian Education-funded Native American schools, initially launched at five schools in New Mexico and Arizona.

"The *Our Way to Health Program* developed by the Myron L. Rolle Foundation is designed to inspire American Indian students to live healthier lifestyles through exercise, outdoor activity, and proper nutrition," said Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk. "The program will celebrate the uniqueness of their heritage and identity in curriculum, develop trust amongst peers, train leaders and involve the community to ensure their needs are met."

Rolle met with 143 fifth and sixth graders from Isleta Elementary and San Felipe Pueblo Elementary School on Tuesday afternoon. He explained the *Our Way to Health Program*, his interest in First Americans, the importance of physical activity and leading a health lifestyle, and answered questions from students, teachers, parents and members of the community. Tomorrow Rolle will kick off the program in Tuba City, Arizona, with an additional 279 Navajo and Hopi Tribe fifth and sixth graders from Tuba City Boarding School, Hotevilla Bacavi Community School and Keams Canyon Elementary School.

"I am inspired by the way First American tribes have persevered and thrived, while retaining their cultural heritage and identity," Rolle said. "There are, however, significant health concerns that challenge this population -- in particular diabetes and obesity. I am excited to be here to launch the *Our Way to Health Program*, which we hope will encourage First American children in middle school to begin managing not only their own diet and exercise but, hopefully by extension, influence the adults in their lives to also begin adopting healthy life style changes."

Our Way to Health provides incentive-based learning experiences, team-building physical activities in the outdoors, health education and diabetes awareness sessions. Rolle initially developed the curriculum while a student at Florida State University for Native American fifth graders at a Seminole Tribe charter school in Okeechobee, Florida. Rolle was an All-American safety for the FSU Seminoles football team in 2008-09. He delayed entering the National Football League Draft until 2010, however, to accept the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship at the University of Oxford. Rolle will earn a Master's Degree in Medical Anthropology and, after playing in the NFL, plans to pursue a career as a brain surgeon.

Unique features of the six-week program include two in-person visits by Myron Rolle and a trip at the end of the semester for the winning teams to a professional or collegiate sporting event. The curriculum

will allow the Bureau of Indian Education to reach students in a new and direct way. The program is competitive, fun, rewarding and is being tailored to meet each school's individual needs.

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) serves 42,000 students in 183 schools and dormitories across the country on 64 reservations in 23 states. The mission statement of BIE reflects its commitment to "manifest consideration of the whole person by taking into account the spiritual, mental, physical, and cultural aspects of the individual."

The Myron L. Rolle Foundation is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization dedicated to the support of health, wellness, educational and other charitable initiatives throughout the world that benefit children and families in need. The Foundation was established in 2009 by Rhodes Scholar and College Football All-American Myron L. Rolle and his family.