

# Michael Paul

2 min read

In celebration of Native American Heritage Month, we had the opportunity to reconnect with Michael Paul, Senior Buyer at CarMax Albuquerque. He was previously featured on The CarMax World for sharing his uncle's inspiring story as a trainer of the Navajo Code Talkers during World War II. This time, Michael opened up about his personal journey with his Navajo heritage and his efforts to promote awareness at his store. This is part 1 of 2\*.

Michael began our conversation by introducing himself in a traditional Navajo manner, starting with his mother's clan, followed by his father's and paternal grandparents' clans. This practice allows fellow Navajo individuals to identify potential connections. He shared that the term "Navajo" is partly derived from how the Spanish referred to his people in the early 1800s, while "Diné" (pronounced "dih-NEH") is the name commonly used among the Navajo



Michael

themselves, honoring their history long before European influence.

Michael also discussed his parents' experiences at American Indian boarding schools, institutions designed to erase Native American culture. These schools often enforced harsh rules, including cutting long hair—a symbol of maturity in many tribes—and forbidding the use of native languages. Despite the trauma associated with these institutions, his parents made the best of their situation and managed to create a stable life for their family, eventually achieving academic and professional success.

His journey reflects a complex identity, blending both Navajo heritage and contemporary influences. "I'm 100% Navajo," Michael states, "Yet on the reservation, they refer to me as 'urban'." He acknowledges the challenges of growing up in an urban setting, which distanced him from traditional practices and from learning how to speak Navajo. Yet he also celebrates his own mile markers – like following in his parents' footsteps by attending college and raising a beautiful family. Growing up in the city caused Michael to have a foot in two worlds, which was confusing for his Native identity. Within the last few years, he has started to seek out further understanding and growth within his rich Navajo heritage.

What does Michael say about today's Navajo people? "We are still here, still



Michael with his late father

thriving.” The Navajo Nation currently numbers approximately 400,000 individuals comprising more than 100 clans, making it the largest federally recognized tribe in the United States. Photos: Michael, and then him with his late father

Part 2 will be featured on the Diversity & Inclusion site later this month.