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## Follow in the steps of the Cat

By Harlan McKosato |

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Have you ever heard the motto "a reader today is a leader tomorrow?" It's a catch phrase used by the National Education Association. I was recently asked to serve as the 2012 Chairperson for NEA-New Mexico's Read Across America program.

My initial thought was "why are they asking me, a radio talk-show host?" The more I thought about it, however, the more sense it made. I read constantly. I read emails, websites, letters, newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc. — I even read books. In fact, when I get this column written I have to read an entire book tonight for tomorrow's broadcast.

Then I read the letter sent to me from the president of NEA-New Mexico expressing her desire to particularly highlight the Native American communities across the state. It made even more sense.

I accepted, and will be following in the footsteps of some very noteworthy New Mexicans, such as author and storyteller Joe Hayes, author Rudolfo Anaya, state Sen. Mary Jane Garcia, U.S. Rep. Martin Heinrich, TV personality Steve Stucker, and musician/performer Al Hurricane. Those are some big shoes to fill.

The Read Across America idea was launched in 1998 and is an annual reading motivation and awareness program that calls for every child in every community to celebrate reading on March 2, the birthday of beloved children's author Dr. Seuss, in the company of a caring adult.

"In New Mexico, we have been celebrating Read Across America since the beginning. Schools around the state celebrate with 'Cat Walks' (based on the Dr. Seuss character The Cat in the Hat), which could be a cakewalk with books as prizes, games, bingo, and all kinds of reading activities," said NEA-New Mexico President Sharon Morgan.

"Students are asked to carry a book with them all day and then drop everything and read when the signal is given. Cafeterias serve up green eggs and ham. High school athletes and student council members come to elementary schools to read to students. Schools have door-decorating contests, poster contests and a variety of other activities," Morgan said. "Some districts have middle and high school students participate in a poetry slam. And of course, the Cat in the Hat visits with students across the state all year long as part of our commitment to promote literacy and reading."

When I thought about my own upbringing, reading and literacy have been the foundation to all the academic and professional successes that I've been fortunate enough to enjoy over the years. The joy of reading has been passed on from me to my fourth-grade son. It is quite a thrill to hear him laughing out loud reading Calvin and Hobbes.

On my radio show we promote a "Book of the Month," featuring a Native author of a recently published book. We give away 10 books to callers who make comments on the air that day. The idea

is to encourage reading, writing and storytelling across Native America. It also means I have to read at least 12 books a year.

Other shows require me to read loads of material to be prepared for the interview and to make sure I at least sound like I know what I'm talking about on the radio. This takes a skill known as reading comprehension. I have to process quickly the information I read.

I'll be taking this opportunity as honorary chairperson to promote reading comprehension and literacy as much as possible (starting with this column). So let's get our children away from those video games for a while. Let's get them off the Internet long enough to stick a book in their hands, have them open it up and read. I really do believe that a "reader today is a leader tomorrow."

*Harlan McKosato, a Sauk/Ioway, is host of the syndicated radio show Native America Calling, which airs weekdays at 11 a.m. on KUNM, 89.9 FM.*