

Just Joni

Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians' native makes history



Proudly marching down the familiar road on the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians reservation, carrying a women veteran's flag alongside the U.S. flag and eagle's staff, Brigadier General Joane Mathews reflects on the events that shaped her into the trailblazer she is today.

Mathews, the first Native American female to serve as the Wisconsin National Guard's deputy adjutant general for the Army, attributes part of her success to her heritage.

"I think growing up on a reservation has given me the culture and the strength to do what I am able to do," said Mathews.

But her road to success wasn't easy.

From a young age, Mathews was determined to move away from her small town and make something of herself, but wasn't quite sure how or in what capacity.

In high school she began working alongside her mother where she developed a strong work ethic and gained appreciation for the commitment needed to be successful. Traits she would carry with her through life.

As she transitioned into young adulthood, Mathews started to crave a life beyond her small reservation and decided to leave home and move in with her older sister in Minneapolis.

Here she spent several years in a clerical position as a typist for the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

Though she enjoyed the job, and even considered a career in criminal justice, Mathews ultimately knew it wasn't for her – she had bigger dreams.

During these times of uncertainty and question, she would recall fond memories of her and her father from years ago when

they would park at the nearby airport and watch planes take off and land for hours on end. Feeling and hearing the 'whoosh' of the airplanes overhead thrilled her.

With thoughts of flying and achieving something great, Mathews decided to enroll at the University of North Dakota for aviation and join the Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

It was in ROTC that she truly began to blossom and grow, earning herself a ROTC scholarship. She learned about leadership, management, and purpose.

These skills combined with what she learned during her teens have helped get her to where she is today – a successful, 30 plus year career in the Army.

In spite of all the accolades and triumphs she's had in the military, Mathews remains humble and likes to be viewed as just "Joni" from Lac du Flambeau.

