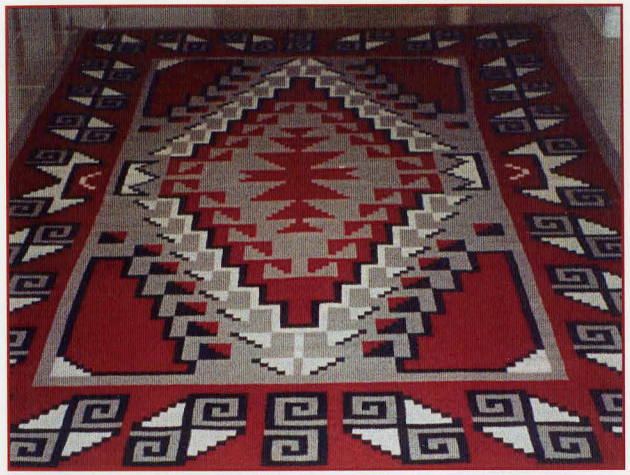

Chiefs Blanket

Rena Begay began her life of weaving as a young girl in Pinon, Arizona in the Navajo Nation by watching her aunt and mother Marie Bekay, at their looms. From them she learned every step of the process; from sheering the sheep to carding, spinning, dying and washing the wool. Even spinning her own warp yarn for each rug. By age seventeen, Rena had completed her first rug, all on her own. It was a Two Grey Hill design. Between her aunt, mother and herself, they shared the weaving tools, until Rena Was in her twenties and received her own set of sacred tools. The Two Grey Hill and Outline were the predominant designs that her aunt and mother produced. Rena, in turn, learned these well. She sold her rugs to the traders in Gallup, New Mexico for many years.

Due to illness, Rena could not weave from 1973 to 1978. Happily, she recovered and was weaving again by the time her eldest daughter Eleanor married. Her daughter and new son-in-law, Victor Beck, inspired her to start entering her rugs in the arts and crafts shows throughout the west. Since then, Rena has consistently won the top awards for her rugs at the most prestigious shows in New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Drawing more inspiration from these shows, Rena decided to try the Chiefs Blanket design, in 1983. She wove tradtional and contemporary style chiefs blankets, but always pushed for beautiful color and design variations within this style. Today Rena is recognized for these variations, which have become her hallmark. along with the densely woven and balanced qualities of her rugs. Now, her rugs are sought after by people all over the U.S. and Canada. One of her large rugs hangs in the Phoenix City Hall, on permanent display.

Native American Artists
Resource Collection
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