

eaglefeathernews

Newspapers will not transmit the Coronavirus

CPMA #40027204

Isolation Warriors

The message was simple. Women and young girls wanted to bring healing to others during this time of crisis.

Tayjah Agecutay participated in the jingle dress dance on social media to bring healing as nations worldwide fight COVID-19.
Photo credit: Jeanelle Mandes

By Jeanelle Mandes
of Eagle Feather News

During the Coronavirus pandemic, self-isolation and social distancing are the main actions people worldwide are being told to do to decrease the spread of the virus. This has led many people to turn to social media for entertainment. Someone in cyberspace came up with the great idea to do social media challenges of jingle dress dancing to uplift the spirits of people who were watching.

Videos of dancers across Turtle Island went viral. The message was simple. Women and even young girls wanted to bring healing to others during this time of crisis.

When seven-year-old Tayjah Agecutay from the Pasqua First Nation heard of the challenge, she

wanted to do her part.
“The jingle dress [dance] heals people... and it’s a gift of healing. That’s what it does,” said Agecutay, who has danced the jingle dress her entire life. “It made me feel good and generous and kind in my heart. I will continue to pray.”

Shana Pasapa from the White Bear First Nation said she recorded herself dancing in a hotel room because she was in self-isolation, but she wanted to contribute.

“I was inspired by all the other dancers and younger dancers too,” said Pasapa, whose Facebook dancing video got over 21,000 views. “I love that we can do this, dancing for the people is such a beautiful blessing, dancing for the elders, children, frontline workers, our men and women.”

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TheJUNOS “A Dream Come True”

“We wanted to create something that made you proud of who you are”

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Online Learning

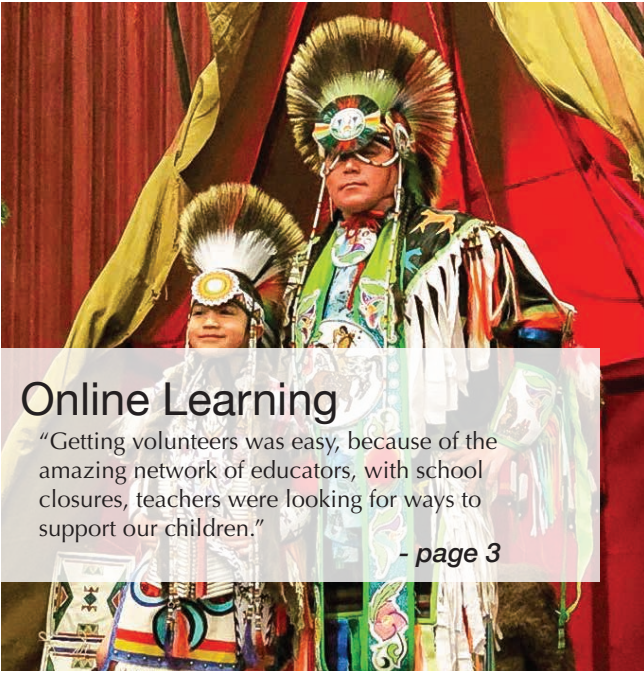
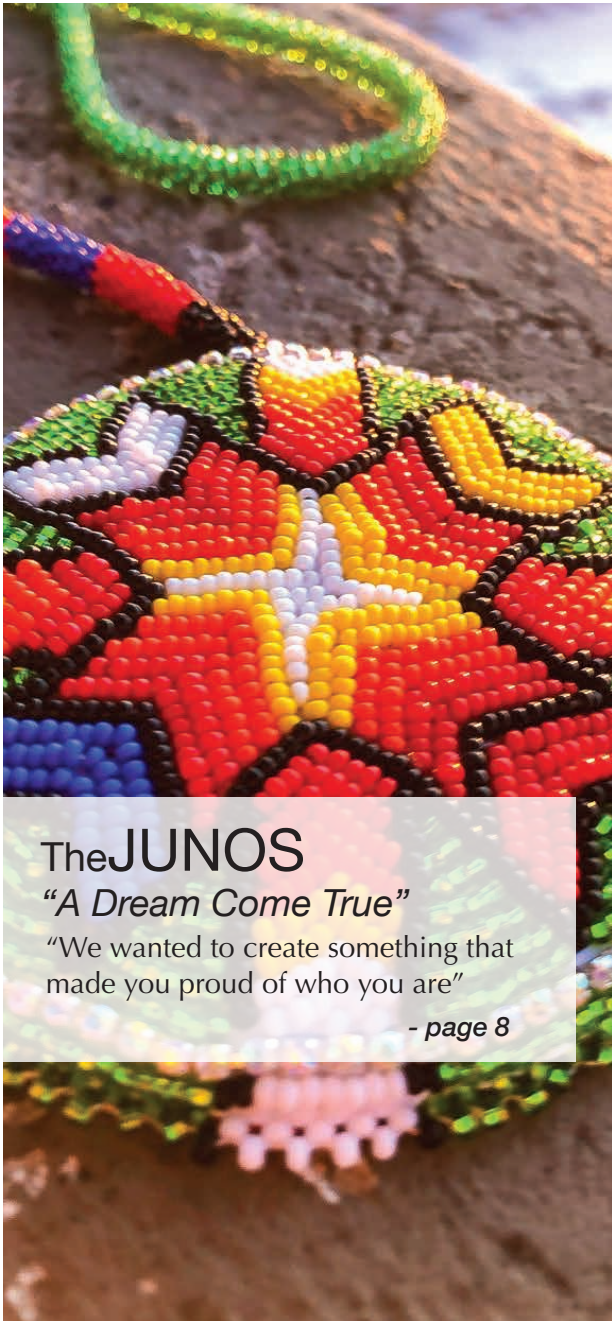
“Getting volunteers was easy, because of the amazing network of educators, with school closures, teachers were looking for ways to support our children.”

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A Social Challenge

“Art is a way for me to have a voice and it always has been, even as a kid. I just didn’t realize it and it’s come to fruition with me

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Jingle dress dancers spread good vibes through Facebook

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During a time of crisis, people need something to believe in and one of the tools of healing is dancing, she said.

“People from across Turtle Island may feel fear so we need to remember that we are survivors. Our people have endured many diseases and we’re still here,” she said. “The jingle dress dance came from a vision after a young girl who was sick. It was this dress that helped her back to health. I’ve been taught to pray while I dance.”

Angel Prosper (Red Buffalo Woman) from the Muskoday First Nation said she participated in the challenge because her friends and family were seeing what this crisis was doing via social media. “I was also called on by my friend to use my medicine, meaning my dance,” she said. “It’s the only way I know that I can help during this time, so I did without hesitation.”

Prosper hopes others will be inspired with hope and she encourages others to take precautions.

“Please stay home and social distance yourselves. The sooner we all do, we can flatten the curve,” she said. “Pray, smudge and use your medicines the way we were taught. We will get through this.”

The jingle dress dance is known in Indigenous cultures and ceremonies to bring healing.



Jingle dress dancer Angel Prosper from the Muskoday First Nation encourages people to take extra precautions during this time of crisis. (Photo submitted by Angel Prosper)



Jaredan Smith, 13, is learning night photography, along with other youth, in the Pinehouse Photography Club. Jaredan captured this unique image under the northern lights.

He posts his pictures on his Facebook page ‘Into the Wild Studios’ to help motivate and inspire others who might be going through tough times, such as depression and anxiety.

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Think Indigenous Online Classroom filling the void

By John Lagimodiere
of Eagle Feather News

Chris Scribe is an educator and he’s not going to let a pandemic interrupt his passion, nor the opportunity for children to learn. That’s why, the day after the schools closed, he wasted no time in creating the Facebook page, Think Indigenous-Online Indigenous Education K-8.

“The idea was sparked from a conversation with my partner Natasha Ouellette, who was concerned with all the schools closing their doors during this pandemic. It got me thinking, what if we created an online space for teachers to volunteer their time to help parents and community extend their learning into their homes, through social media,” said Scribe in a Facebook interview. “This is what sparked the online learning classroom through Think Indigenous. I wrote a status on the Monday schools were closed and on Tuesday we started teaching.”

The online version offers a variety of courses. Scribe asked the instructors to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into their teaching.

“As Indigenous teachers, connecting Indigenous knowledge to curriculum is something we do without even knowing. These online lessons have hit so many outcomes and indicators and transcends borders,” said Scribe. “Getting volunteers was easy, because of the amazing network of educators, with school closures, teachers were looking for ways to support our children.”

K-8 Lessons are scheduled Monday, Wednesday and Friday with Indigenous Knowledge sharing on Tuesday and Thursday. The lessons have proven to be very popular. They already have 9,300 followers on Facebook and, according to their analytics, they have reached over 125,000 people.

Chris Scribe is the perfect person to pull this together. A Nakoda-Cree from Norway House MB and Carry the Kettle SK, he is the Executive Director of Think Indigenous Events Inc. and the Director of Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan. Teaching since 2005, he has taught internationally in Australia, in First Nation communities and with the Province, including every grade from 2 - 12 , was a special education teacher,

vice principal, and principal.

His wide array of contacts of teachers and cultural leaders are now filling the airwaves with lessons and they have people tuning in from around the world.

“Curtis Vinish, a recent SUNTEP grad has also been working behind the scenes supporting this work and without him and the many other volunteers, this would not be possible,”

added Scribe. “The feedback from parents and students has been amazing. We get messaged from a global audience with people expressing their gratitude and appreciation for the lessons.”

Once grateful mother wrote: “Love this so much. I appreciate the tips and indigenous teachings. I’m an adoptive mom that’s always looking for cultural resources to show my daughter. Thanks for this group.”

In this trying time of fear and closure, the online offering of education serves an important void and keeps the teachings alive and gives the children resources. But to Scribe, it is what they must do. “As Indigenous educators, it is our responsibility to share knowledge with our children. This work is simply an extension of that responsibility. Creating small steps toward decolonization for Indigenous children and creating stronger relationships (and) understanding with non-indigenous students is the power of education and this online classroom has given us a global platform to do just that,” said Scribe. “The silver lining to this pandemic is that through the beauty of humanity, we have created a platform to support each other.”



Chris Scribe and his son Camden during a lesson on braids on the Think Indigenous-Online Indigenous Education K-8 Facebook school.



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This month's issue is a bit thinner than usual

The Coronavirus pandemic has changed many things, including how we cover stories due to social distancing. We have been covering stories by phone and photos are submitted or taken in person at a distance. Remember, this is only temporary.

Looking at this crisis worldwide, it has resulted in countless deaths, those infected are being heavily monitored in hospitals, home isolations, restricted travels, many people are forced to work from home or being temporarily laid off, students are finishing up the school year through technology, businesses are being temporarily closed and the list goes on.

It's a scary time we are witnessing. But it's also very important for people to take social distancing and isolating seriously as the numbers of COVID-19 cases in Saskatchewan increase daily. Practice proper hand washing, wear

masks and rubber gloves if you need to be out in public, disinfect your home and avoid social gatherings, even if it's to meet up with a friend for coffee. It's still a risk. In order to flatten the curve, we must follow the precautionary measures to help stop the spread.

I remember seeing someone's post on Facebook that stuck with me.

"The air seems cleaner, the world quieter, people are conscious about hygiene and health again...it seems like this COVID-19 is a reset button for humanity."

Made sense to me as we are being more aware of our own health and being mindful of others.

Although isolation at home can be boring, I've managed to find ways to be more productive than Netflix binge watching. I actually decluttered my closet and filled numerous bags of clothes and jackets. I spring cleaned my entire place, blew the dust off an old book and read, strummed my guitar that has been sitting in the corner of my living room, and when I feel like browsing Facebook, I am entertained with posts of how people are coping with social distancing.

There's a group on Facebook called 'Social Distance Powwow' where videos of people singing and dancing are posted. It's pretty neat to see how people are finding different ways to stay in touch with each other and including culture using technology.

I've also seen numerous posts of expected graduates who expressed their disappointment with convocation postponements or cancellations.

It's a scary time we are witnessing. But it's also very important for people to take social distancing and isolating seriously.

For those who were expected to graduate preschool, kindergarten, high school, college or university this year and who may not see that special ceremony they were hoping for, just know that we are extremely proud of your achievements - young and old. Your accomplishments do not go unnoticed and we, at Eagle Feather News, want to emphasize that. Don't forget to submit your grad photos (even if you don't have that special ceremony) for our July issue.

With that, be safe everyone. Practice hand washing, social distancing, stay home and if you need to be out in public, wear a face mask and gloves. Following these and many more precautionary measures will help flatten the curve. Ekosi.



Editorial Notes

Jeanelle Mandes

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The New Normal

We knew it was coming but we didn't know it was coming. We saw it in China and then it moved across Europe and – Italy seemed the one that resonated with everyone in the west and then...

...And then all of our lives changed in a hurry. All those things you thought were so essential – going to an office for work, having to have a Starbucks coffee every morning, hanging out with your friends on weekend – those things just slipped away. Sometimes one by one, sometimes all at once.

I will be fine, I bragged on Facebook, I grew up in a dysfunctional home. I was joking but there is some truth in the statement. The word dysfunctional is a misnomer. My family was very functional; it just wasn't Cosby Show normal (although we all know that show was masking some creepy shit.) My parents would routinely break up because of my dad's drinking and my mom would swoop us up in the middle of the night and we would leave him. It always felt like a grand adventure.

Wrong shoes, missed homework, returning library books – all that forgotten as you ran out the door to the warm car waiting outside to take us to some place, safe and exciting.

In the backseat, my three siblings and I would be wrapped up in blankets as I watched the stars through the windows. We would head to my auntie Squaw's house in Lebrét where she would have the door open and a bed made in the living

room. She would be sitting in the kitchen, a kettle on for tea, because this was going to be a good talk.

One time, sans car, we left on foot. We walked down the road in the dark to my Uncle Frank's house. The road was well known to us, we ran back and forth on it all day but it felt different in the night. How many walks do we take at night? Hearing the crickets, our dog running through the brush beside us smelling and chasing old toms also on their way to somewhere. And when we got to our destination, Uncle Frank's house, the door was open. As we slipped off to sleep, Uncle would strum his guitar and we would fall asleep to the sound of old country music (which was fitting, my parent's relationship seemed to be a living, breathing Country song.)

When I was in my twenties, I would tell these stories to my friends and they always seemed to miss the point. Instead of smiles of understanding, they would look sad and say, "Oh you poor things." And while we were poor – I cannot stress that enough – like one pair of jeans poor, we were always together and safe.

During this time, my toddler and his cousin run through the house chasing one another. They play games together. They chatter and yell as only two toddlers can. Last night, they were running over the furniture and teasing the dog until he was sweating with excitement. They know there is a virus out there and that's why we can't go swimming, or play in the playground. They know



That's what she said
Dawn Dumont

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that they can't go into stores anymore and they just nod and tell me I have to buy them toys. (Not a whole lot of toys in Sobeys, just a bunch of people moving fast and avoiding eye contact.)

When I was little, my Great Uncle Ed used to live in a small house next to us. He would come visit every night and sit at the kitchen table while we chattered to him about all kinds of things. No matter what we told him – "I got an A!", "I hate my friend Jacky!", "I set a fire!" – he would always smile and nod his head and say, "go on, go on."

In his memory, I got a tattoo a month ago. It says, "kiyam." People tell me it means, "let it be, let it go." But whenever I look at it, I think of my Uncle Ed and to me it means: "go on, keep going."

My childhood was not "normal", but it taught me that rules can slip away at any moment. It's truth that stays – that family – whatever that looks like to you – is all that matters.



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Indigenous representation is key for First Nations artists

By Kaitlynn Nordal
for Eagle Feather News

Growing up, Felicia Gay wasn't exposed to contemporary artists who share her Indigenous background, but she is now seeking to change that for others and impact social change in her role as curator at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina.

"You have to remember at that time I wasn't necessarily exposed to a lot of Indigenous contemporary artists," said Gay. "I didn't feel comfortable going to public galleries. I think a lot of Indigenous people feel that it's not for me, that's a place where rich white people go, but in reality, I think most public galleries are changing and shifting that they want these to be more community spaces where lots of different voices come together."

Felicia Gay, a Swampy Cree woman from Cumberland House, has had an interest in art ever since she was a child.

"I've always drawn and written poetry. I did well in art all through high school, but I wouldn't say I did well enough to become an artist in terms of drawing or painting. In terms of utilizing art as a way to talk about things that didn't come until adulthood," said Gay.

Gay realized art could be used as a social commentary while taking art history classes from Ruth Cuthand, a prominent Saskatchewan artist, at the University of Saskatchewan. This is when she knew art was the path for her.

"I started taking more classes," said Gay. "The professors were aware of how art and decolonizing can work together as a strategy and they brought to our attention many artists who do this type of work."

Gay was inspired by the artists she was learning about in class such Faye HeavyShield and Rebecca Belmore, who are both prominent First Nations artists.

Gay took her interest in art one step further and started working in art galleries when she was 19. She worked at a small gallery in The Pas, Man., Snelgrove Gallery at the University of Saskatchewan and Tribe Inc. in Saskatoon, among others. At Tribes Inc., working under Laurie Blondeau, she learned more about the contemporary art world. When she opened Red Shift Gallery – her own art gallery, in Saskatoon, which has since closed – Gay learned to be a curator.

Since then, Gay, now in her 40s, has used her influence to help put up installations that deal with social issues. She said she continues to use art to spark social change for one simple reason – it works.

"I think it's important to me because it's important for me to make transformative change as a mom. I need to do that for my kids and for my community. It's in our belief system that when you gain knowledge you have to share it; you're not supposed to keep it to yourself, you have to keep giving

back. If I am going to live my life in a good way, then I have to adhere to that," said Gay.

John Hampton, director of programs at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, met Gay in 2018 when driving past the Wanuskewin Galleries, where she was working at the time. He stopped in hoping she was at work that day to meet her and compliment her on her work.

"My first impression of Felicia was someone who really has their finger on the pulse of the artist community in the prairies and in Canada and is able to understand what people will connect with to make those links between what artists are doing and what the community is thinking and feeling," said Hampton.

They have worked together September 2019 and Hampton feels fortunate to work with Gay.

"I think we are lucky as an institution to have Felicia's voice here because the passion for the social issues she addresses is so personal and very earnest," said Hampton. "I think the artists that she works with and the audiences can appreciate that it's coming from that genuine place and that she's not afraid to speak from a place of lived experience and her own knowledge and position."

Just like Gay, Hampton feels it's important that art addresses relevant social issues.

"It is space where you can communicate complex and nuanced situations in a way that allows room for people to insert their own experience and viewpoints. It creates space for people to find new understandings without feeling explicitly preached at," Hampton said.

"When you see Felicia speak about an artist's work or about an exhibition that she's working on, audiences can't help but feel that personal connection because they understand that sense of honesty and that she's coming from a genuine and heart felt place," he added.

Social change won't happen without different people in positions of power, according to Gay.

"It's important for institutions like public galleries to have Indigenous staff in senior positions where they have power and have opportunities to make space in the institution," she said. "Art is a way for me to have a voice and it always has been, even as a kid. I just didn't realize it and it's come to fruition with me being a curator."



Felicia Gay, curatorial fellow at the Mackenzie Art Gallery, has had an interest in art she was a child and hopes to continue to use it as a commentary to spark social change.
(Photo by Kaitlynn Nordal)



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a place to go
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- Mason Cooley

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I’m tired, but I’m fired up

It’s been a long night
Long life, long time fighting
Let out a long sigh
Alright, why am I trying?
‘Cause look at how far you have come
And look at all that you have going
Look at who you have become
Baby, you gotta keep going
I’m tired but I am fired up

Ooh-oh, rest your weary heart
Dry your teary eyes
I know you are scarred
And torn apart inside
Darlin’, so am I, so am I

I’m tired, but I’m fired up
Tired, but I’m fired up
Jhené Aiko – Born Tired

This song resonates with me right now. During this pandemic, we are all faced with our own challenges because we are going through changes that are out of our control and disrupt our routines and lives. Things are off, but they have been off for a long time. I hope if we can learn anything from this, it’s that this individualistic capitalistic society has contributed to us taking the things that matter for granted and perhaps in the face of diversity we can genuinely appreciate, respect, love and cherish one another a little more.

It is hard to concentrate on the piles of work that lay before me in order to graduate while my daughters and I transition to home school and full-time parenting. I see the only thing that matters is the only thing that ever did matter, my

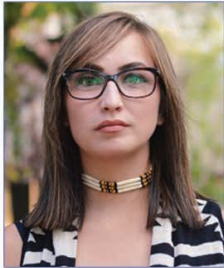
daughters, my family. In this uncharted territory we are entering, it is like waiting for a tsunami that we all know is coming and we all need to brace ourselves. In times of uncertainty or fear we run to those who matter most and feel like home. We are worried about our loved ones and the inevitable change we are faced with means we might come face to face with demons we have been running from.

This can be an opportunity for healing from unresolved issues. Perhaps there can be growth to come from this uncertain situation. It comes down to self-discipline and having responsibility to help protect one another. Currently the only way to try not to let this virus harm as many people as possible is to stay home as much as possible.

This may also mean, with the time given to us to slow down our fast-paced lives, we can focus on finding new interests or developing skills. I have been doing a relaxed home schooling for my daughters focusing on the Dakota component. We are all learning more Dakota words, as one of my goals is for my daughters and me to know our language.

This brings me back to the importance of arts, entertainment and music in helping us get us through this time. The other day my six-year-old daughter told me, “art is sacred,” and told me how important it is to be creative. She has a very kind old soul.

I have been doing my best to share songs, sto-



Comment

Alyson Bear

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ries and art that comes from Indigenous teachings. We listen to the women’s warrior song every day, we start our class with a smudge and we each say what we are grateful for. At story time we read any story they want and we have been learning about White Buffalo Woman.

I try to take every day as a blessing. I was told not to live from either car accident I was in. Therefore, I don’t want to waste another day nor lead my daughters down a path of self-destruction. I had to learn things the hard way, which has shaped me into who I am. I see how fragile and precious life is, especially as a mother. I know they will make mistakes, but if I’m healthy, then I’ll always have their backs and they can always lean on me.

Like the song says, we must keep going.

I have love and respect for those on the front lines who put themselves at risk for the health of everybody.

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Indigenous Juno nominees still to receive local beaded medallions

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Two Saskatoon-based artists, Honey Constant and Keith Sunchild, created twenty hand-crafted and emblematic medallions, which were to be prominently featured at this year’s now-cancelled Juno Awards in Saskatoon. Although the spotlight may be gone, their artistic work and enthusiasm has not lost any shine.

“The medallions are something Honey and I created with our own thoughts and processes. Being able to say ‘I created this on behalf of (Wanuskewin’) for all these artists’ is still something very exciting and rewarding,” said Sunchild, member of Thunderchild First Nation.

The medallions were a result of Candace Wasacase-Lafferty forming a 2020 Junos Indigenous Relations Sub-Committee in order to weave more Indigenous components into this year’s awards. After consulting with Wanuskewin Heritage Park, the committee commissioned Constant and Sunchild to create twenty medallions to be presented to each of this year’s Indigenous Juno nominees.

“I asked them to come up with a medallion represented all Indigenous people: First Nation, Metis, and Inuit. Something that reflects the land that the event is being hosted on,” said Wasacase-Lafferty. “There was a lot of a thought and care that went into how these medallions were to reflect the diversity of people here in Saskatchewan.”

In each medallion, the geometric design honours the traditional patterns of Plains designs. The medicine wheel arrows indicate the connectiveness of everything. The blue represents the Metis people, white represents the Inuit and the great northern landscapes, yellow the diverse prairie ecosphere, red the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and green represents Saskatchewan and our grasslands.

“We spent a week designing different things. We wanted to create something that made you proud of who you are,” said Constant, member of Sturgeon Lake First Nation.

Constant explained that the medallions took about six weeks to complete, which she juggled between work and completing her Masters in Archaeology at the University of Saskatchewan.

“These medallions have a lot of meaning in what they represent to peo-



The beaded medallions, designed and made by Constant and Sunchild, to be presented to the 2020 Indigenous Juno nominees. (photo: Honey Constant)



Saskatoon-based artists, Keith Sunchild and Honey Constant, (Photos submitted by artists)

ple here, but also represent to me sharing my culture and being an Indigenous archaeologist in this world.”

Prior to the awards cancellation, Constant and Sunchild were informed that singer-songwriter IsKwe was planning on wearing the medallion during her live Junos performance. A producer from the Junos was reportedly so impressed with the medallions that they integrated Constant and Sunchild’s medallion design into the stage for IsKwe’s performance.

“It’s totally understandable the event was cancelled,” said Sunchild. “The only downside is that I was excited to see our pieces showcased on live TV.”

“Of course it was disappointing at first, but you have to think about the implications,” added Constant. “I’m glad they will still receive them and understand the meaning behind them.”

Wasacase-Lafferty said the committee is still planning on presenting the medallions to the artists, packaged with an video message from everyone involved in its creation.

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Tattoo artist followed his dream

By Suliman Adam
For Eagle Feather News

Jonas Thomson had an epiphany over a decade ago that made him pursue his passion for the art of tattooing.

“I just had a dream one night that I was tattooing. So I was like, ‘that’s something I want to do.’ At the time I didn’t have money for it, so I sought out a few people, got some equipment and that’s when I started,” Thomson said.

In his early days in school, he was artistic and used to get in trouble for drawing and painting, instead of concentrating on his subjects, he said.

But years later, his focus on the artistic was still at the forefront, as he started to practice his tattooing skills by working on his family and friends.

He applied to apprentice under a few tattoo artists in Regina, but when he was rejected, he read books about human anatomy, the colour wheel and art fusion.

He moved to Phoenix, Ariz. for three years, where he finally got an apprenticeship in a tattoo shop, while pursuing a career in his other interest, golf.

“It only takes a year under another artist to be certified and that’s what it took and I was glad I gained that,” Thomson said, noting he got his certificate in 2016 and moved back to Regina.

Thomson said he was judged as a young native tattooing on treaty land and faced some negative reaction to his jaw and neck tattoos.

He overcame those issues and opened his own tattoo studio, following protocol and adhering to safety and hygienic guidelines, while putting his community of Carry The Kettle Nakoda Nation on the map.

“Everything has to be clean and sterilized. You come into my shop, you’re taking your shoes off at the door,” he said. “Your floors have to be clean, there’s got to be minimal dust. Every little particle you can think of.”

Thomson believes that his connection with his clients is what makes his artwork distinctive. He takes the time to chat with them, sometimes for hours, listening to their stories and bringing their artwork to life.

“For the past four years, I have been pushing for this type of mindset to bring their designs to life,” he said. “Your mind, your body, everything has to be into it. That’s the first important step for me, is finding your zone.”

At his shop on Carry The Kettle, Thomson sees a clientele that is 40 per cent Indigenous, 60 per cent non-Indigenous. Some of his most memorable clients are NHL players, Ethan Bear, and team members from the Edmonton Oilers.

Thomson is motivated by the relationships he develops.

“For a person to be committed to something like this, to get a piece of artwork that’s going to last forever... that’s priceless. The tears, the smiles, the hugs, that brand new relationship and continued relationship with the client, that feeling that I made this person happy,” he said.

Ray McKay, a registered nurse, who got a sleeve tattoo from Thomson, recalls that he gave his idea and says the final format spoke to him.

“He does very good darker work, black and white, that’s what I like, good traditional pieces, steady hands, very realistic and definitely unique too,” McKay said.

Kristin Haywahe, a youth mental health and addiction worker, said she was nervous getting her first tattoo, which carries a significant meaning. “I was actually way happier than what I thought it was going to be, because

you read these stories and people are unhappy with their work, so it exceeded my expectations,” she said.

Now 34, Thomson also works with youth in the community, offering one-on-one services like mental wellness, cultural teachings and taking them out for hockey games. “Those might be little young leaders,” he said.

“My late father told me to be humble, don’t be afraid to do anything, and treat others how you want to be treated.”



Jonas Thomson, 34, launches Goodheart Tattoo from his community of Carry The Kettle Nakoda Nation. (Photo Credit: Suliman Adam)

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Snake Oil Salesmen want to make people happy

By Isaac Adeoluwa Atayero
For Eagle Feather News

Indigenous country-rock band Snake Oil Salesmen is gearing up for the release of a new album.

The band mates say they are more excited about this project than they were about their two previous records.

"I think we are on the verge of putting out a really good album," said guitar player Danny Blondeau.

The upcoming release signifies a shift in the collaboration process for the band, which has been around for nearly a decade. Bellegarde wrote most of the songs on their past releases.

"We are doing a lot more collaborating where we are taking the time to jam in our studio and have some fun ... once we are ready to go, we start recording scratch tracks so that we can really nail down individual parts," said Bellegarde.

The band was formed in 2011 when Blondeau, Sterling Brass and Shane Bellegarde got together and started making music for fun.

"Danny's dad taught him how to play the guitar, so he has been playing his whole life. I got started much later and spent so many hours just jamming and having fun with him before we ever decided to turn it into a band," said singer Bellegarde.

Bellegarde met bassist Brass on a movie set where both men were working.

Drummer, Cade Stewart, joined the band five years ago. In the early days of the band, different drummers came and went, which was tough for Brass.

"When some guy comes in and then he's gone, it gets a little disheartening, but then, once we got Cade in the group, he was our missing link. Being the other half of the rhythm section, it is just great to play with such a solid drummer," said Brass.

The name of the band, Snake Oil Salesmen, was inspired by olden days charlatans who went from town to town selling fraudulent medicine and disappeared before the townspeople realized they had been swindled.

"We like the concept that when you are playing music, you are not feeling any pain. You are not thinking about your troubles or the things that bother you so, at least for that short while, you're cured. You're not feeling anything and you're happy. Hopefully, we've made off with your money before you realize it's just music," said Bellegarde.

The band released their previous albums on vinyl, has opened for well-known band The Blazers and sold out Regina's oldest live music venue, The Exchange. It has received significant airplay on SiriusXM channel 165, Regina's 91.3FM CJTR, and MBC radio across Saskatchewan.

Blondeau's favourite thing is performing music that has a positive effect on people.

"I just love it when you can feel the energy come back and you can feel the house actually start rocking," said Blondeau.

The name of the band, Snake Oil Salesmen, was inspired by olden days charlatans who went from town to town selling fraudulent medicine.

The band members are proud to be Indigenous. Blondeau is of German and Metis origin, Brass is Saulteaux from Key First Nation and Bellegarde is from Little Black Bear First Nation.

"I'm going to First Nations University right now and some of the things that I'm learning are starting to show up in my writing and will be showcased on this next album. Some of those are the history of Indigenous people and their interaction with the colonial system. I can't help but talk about what's on my mind, so I don't feel a pressure to do it, it just happens naturally," said Bellegarde.

The band members all balance nine-to-five jobs with their music-making. Blondeau, 32, and Bellegarde, 39, are married with children. Blondeau works as a boilermaker while Bellegarde is a family treatment leader. Brass, 47, is a barber with two children and 41-year-old Stewart is a chef.

The band mates agree that being in the band is therapeutic and allows them to do what they love.



L-R: Sterling Brass, Danny Blondeau, Shane Bellegarde and Cade Stewart, band members of The Snake Oil Salesmen meet up to prepare for an upcoming gig. (Photo Credit: Isaac Adeoluwa Atayero)

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Reconciliation Allies: Alan Long

By Betty Ann Adam
of Eagle Feather News

Alan Long began life on the white side of Saskatchewan’s racial divide, but his own choices and the revelation of a family secret, set him on a path toward reconciliation and advocacy.

“Growing up in settler society, my main contact with Indigenous people was in town... with all those stereotypes,” he said in recent interview.

Long was taught to be afraid of Indigenous people and to not go near the reserve.

“As you mature, you examine the way you looked at the world,” he said.

Long’s childhood on a farm near Lloydminster was steeped in the story of his heroic ancestor, George Mann, who was the farm instructor at Onion Lake at the time of the 1885 Battle of Batoche and the Frog Lake Massacre.

The family narrative recalled that in the days after the battle that ended the so-called Riel Rebellion, Mann learned that a group of First Nations warriors had killed eight settlers, including the Indian Agent and farm instructor, at Frog Lake. He skillfully escaped with his wife and family under cover of darkness.

Years after completing a degree in agronomy, where Long saw “settler racism on steroids,” he left farming and returned to university, where he studied drama and took Native studies courses.

There, he met Pete Chief, who was a descendant of the Onion Lake chief, Seekascootch, who, Long learned, had saved Mann’s life, by warning him about the killings and telling him to leave.

The Indians saw him drive his horses and wagon into a slough in his panic to leave.

“My whole world really did get flipped upside down... That’s reconciliation slamming you right in the face,” Long said.

Long met Chief’s grandmother, Mary Whitestone, and discovered that his own great grandfather had fathered Whitestone’s sister, Mabel.

“Then she said, ‘you’ve got to call me kokum now. I’m your kokum, you’re part of our family,’” Long said.

He was stunned by the news, but soon began meeting and getting to know his Cree relations. He also learned that his grandfather had fathered a Cree son, so he has more relations through his uncle Harold Jimmy, from the Thunderchild area.

Long wrote a Master’s thesis in 2007 about the differences between the two narratives.

By then, he had been involved for seven years in Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company (now known as the Gordon Tootoosis Nikaniwin Theatre (GTNT)).

He worked with the company’s Circle of Voices program, which helps youth tell their stories through theatre, among other roles in the organization, before becoming general manager in 2011.

He discovered that capital project grant money had been used for operating expenses and the company was in trouble.

Eventually, the former general manager pleaded guilty to fraud and the company’s former accountant was reprimanded by the Chartered Professional Accountants disciplinary tribunal and fined \$10,000 in relation to the matter.

GTNT Board chair Irene Oakes joined the board soon after the discovery and says Long led the work to rebuild the company, which is now

on solid ground, organizationally and financially.

“Our doors probably would have shut down. Honestly, if it wasn’t for Alan and his perseverance, his commitment, his diligence in addressing our financial issues, our governance issues, I honestly believe our doors would have shut down,” she said.

“The theatre company had to work really hard reestablishing our credibility with our funders. He worked really hard on that. I miss him,” she said.

In 2015 SNTC changed its name to honour Tootoosis, one of its founders. After 15 years with the company, Long moved on.

Now director of Public Relations for Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, (SOTS) Long continues to advocate for Indigenous inclusion and acknowledgement.

Construction is underway on an amphitheatre on the riverbank that has been home to the tent theatre since 1985 and Long was instrumental in bringing in Cree knowledge keeper Joseph Naytowhow, who has designed a contemplation circle that will be a permanent feature of the site.

A new walkway will follow the river behind the amphitheatre and the entire site will be accessible year round. Walkers will discover a circle of large boulders with interpretive panels, which will acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous history. It will be a place to smudge, pray or tell stories, Long said.

Indigenous partners are guiding the process; SOTS has established relationships with Saskatoon Tribal Council, Gabriel Dumont Institute and an elders circle.

SOTS is hoping to provide a link to Indigenous story telling and theatre through its connection to a project Meewasin is now planning.

“We’re looking at how we can tie into this new story that’s being told about the river valley, about the original people and that story that’s not really a part of any interpretive panel or not that significantly, until more recently,” Long said.

The seeds of plan to create a ceremonial site north of the amphitheatre are also germinating, he said.

Former City of Saskatoon Indigenous liaison, Gilles Dorval, was an early proponent of Indigenous elements for the site.

“Gilles invited me to Reconciliation Saskatoon and he said, ‘Don’t name it the Dead White Playwrite Park...You should make this welcoming to everyone in the community.’ We took that to heart,” Long said.

“There’s a commitment to keep that relationship going forever,” he said.



Alan Long, public relations director for Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, strives to include and acknowledge Indigenous people in plans for the company’s new site design. (photo: unknown)



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