

DRIVING FORCES

INNOVATION ON MONTANA'S RESERVATIONS



NATIVE NEWS 2014

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Staff

EDITORS

EBEN WRAGGE-KELLER

RIC SANCHEZ

STACY THACKER

ADVISERS

JASON BEGAY

JEREMY LURGIO

DESIGNERS

ALLISON BYE (PRINT)

JESS NEARY (PRINT)

TRAVIS L. COLEMAN (WEB)

REPORTERS

ZENO WICKS IV

ASHLEY NERBOVIG

AMY R. SISK

JACKSON BOLSTAD

KATHERYN HOUGHTON

BJORN BERGESON

CHRISTOPHER ALLEN

RUTH EDDY

JORDON NIEDERMEIER

KEVIN DUPZYK

PHOTOGRAPHERS/ MULTIMEDIA

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AUSTIN J. SMITH

MEGHAN NOLT

SEABORN LARSON

LOUISE JOHNS

ELLIOTT NATZ

LESLIE HITTMEIER

KATE SIBERELL

SARAH VAN NORTWICK

Table of Contents

SPLIT DECISIONS	BETWEEN NATIONS	OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE	BLANK PAGES	NOT TRANSLATABLE
BLACKFEET	URBAN	REGIONAL	FORT BELKNAP	FLATHEAD
4	10	15	18	24

Innovation

NEWS REPORTS paint Montana's reservations as depressing and rife with problems: Anemic economies. Corrupt politics. Malnutrition. Substance abuse.

Efforts to see things differently often go underreported. Each of the state's seven reservations can count among its members proud people who see opportunities for change.

This year's edition of the University of Montana School of Journalism's Native News Honors Project examines the search for innovative approaches to problems on tribal lands.

On some reservations, business is a driving force. A grocery store undergoes a makeover to improve nutrition in a food desert on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. A pub in Fort Peck challenges stereotypes of alcohol abuse.

In other cases, tribes turn to their elders to ensure their cultural traditions remain strong. On the Fort Belknap reservation, a foster grandmother tries to relate to the youth at the school where she works. On the Flathead, Kootenai elders struggle to preserve the language that expresses their worldview in ways English cannot.

Even for those mired in troubles, there are visions of change. Law enforcement officers seek an arrangement that can serve the vast expanse of the Crow reservation. A mother on the Rocky Boy's reservation imagines the life her son could have in a detention center closer to home — one already built but unused. A Blackfeet woman collects signatures on a petition to recall the fractured tribal council that has paralyzed her reservation.

Then there are those who find their

identities challenged in ways unimaginable to many Montanans. There is the question of whether to live on or off the reservation: A Fort Peck woman looks back at yellowing photographs of her family's relocation to California. A number of artists — visual artists, filmmakers, musicians — find that following their muse means thinking deeply about the role of their cultures in their work.

This year marks the 23rd Native News Honors Project. The stories are told in print, multimedia and, for the first time, as audio presentations. Some things change; others stay the same. Change can be a frightening proposition, but for the people in these stories, it is often, quite simply, a consequence of self-determination — attempts to mold life on the reservation into something a little different and, hopefully, better. ▽

Acknowledgements

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If you have comments about the project, we'd like to hear from you. Email us at jason.begay@umontana.edu or jeremy.lurgio@umontana.edu or write to Native News Honors Project, School of Journalism, University of Montana, 32 Campus Drive, Missoula, MT 59812. ▽

COVER PHOTO BY TOMMY MARTINO

MISSING FROM
THE MENU

N. CHEYENNE

30

LACKING LAW
ENFORCEMENT

CROW

34

BREWING A
NEW CULTURE

FORT PECK

38

DREAMING OF
DETENTION

ROCKY BOY'S

43

WANT
TO
SEE
MORE?

VISIT OUR
WEBSITE
FOR
ADDITIONAL
MULTIMEDIA
CONTENT
INCLUDING
AUDIO AND
VIDEO
PACKAGES

CHECK
THEM
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ANNA BULL SHOE sits at her kitchen table in Browning, reading from a thick document naming enrolled members of the Blackfeet tribe. Bull Shoe uses the document to verify signatures on her petition to remove the entire Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. To sign the petition, a tribal member must be 18 and eligible to vote.

SPLIT DECISIONS

BLACKFEET CITIZENS FIGHT TO FIX FRACTURED GOVERNMENT

STORY BY BJORN BERGESON
PHOTOS BY ELLIOTT NATZ

ANNE POLLOCK read the letter in silence. Someone had photographed and uploaded it to Facebook within the hour, like an Internet meme, but the heading at the top and the signatures at the end marked it as an official document. As she neared the end, she shook her head from side to side and her eyes welled up with tears of frustration.

The letter was written and signed by one faction of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council and addressed to the other faction. It informed all the tribal employees their paychecks would not be issued on time the next day, or the day after that. Furthermore, it asked the employees to walk off of their jobs in protest against the other council, but Pollock knew that anyone who did that would be fired.

Pollock is employed by the Indian Health Services. The program, like many others in the Blackfeet Nation, is federally funded. As a result, the council has to approve her paychecks as well as more than 800 other employees.

The council schism makes life confusing and frustrating, Pollock said, especially when employees can be fired on the whims of the council members.

"And that's scary," she said. "It's scary because I've got bills to pay. I've got food to put on the table. It's just not the easiest thing. Especially around here."

In October 2013, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council split into two separate factions: one faction run by Chairman Willie A. Sharp Jr., who was elected in 2010, and the other led by Council Secretary Roger "Sassy" Running Crane. Both factions blame the other for the split, and both sides have created a situation that leaves employees like Pollock and their paychecks caught in the middle.

The political turmoil gripping the Blackfeet Nation isn't new or unique to Indian Country. Many tribes have faced dysfunctional governments. For the Blackfeet, the issues dividing the council are multi-faceted. The problems stem from a boilerplate constitution that was adopted by the tribe in 1935. The constitution has no separation of powers.

Issues regarding tribal enrollment and blood quantum play a large role, as do oft-cited problems like nepotism, embezzlement and election fraud. A new tribal election is scheduled for June 6, 2014. But as the divide in the council has grown, fractures have started to appear in the bedrock of the community. Many people are pushing for change, but the struggle is in how to go about it.

"Well, what's going to happen tomorrow?" Pollock asked. "Are we going to go to work? Are our paychecks going to be there? Or are we not going to get them until Friday? Or are we not going to get them for a couple of weeks?"

Still, Pollock said she is one of the lucky ones. Anna Bull Shoe, Pollock's partner, brings in enough money through her own business, making and selling breakfasts at the schools and the hospital in Browning, that even when Pollock's checks come late, they have been able to make it through. But many tribal employees are trying to support families on one paycheck. And when the money isn't there on payday, the situation can turn dire.

Bull Shoe is one of many people trying to improve the situation. She has been collecting documents and signatures for a recall petition that if accepted, would have the entire business council replaced before the upcoming election.

Time is running out, though. The Sharp faction has appointed an election board, a move the Bureau of Indian Affairs has declared illegal, while the Running Crane faction is seeking to reappoint the 2012 election board, which the BIA said would also be illegal. Regardless, both sides are pressing ahead with election plans. Despite its skepticism of both factions, the BIA has been reluctant to intervene, calling the matter an internal affair.

Either way, the Blackfeet Constitution states the business council must ratify any recall petition. Given the fractured governing body, that seems unlikely. Bull Shoe intends to file her petition directly with the BIA. The move goes against the constitution, but Bull Shoe said she sees no other solution.

"Which council would I take it to?" she asked. "The ones at the building, or the ones at the cafe? There is no council right now."

She also plans to send copies of the petition to Washington, D.C., and Helena, as well as the regional BIA offices in Billings. Last, to make sure the petition doesn't disappear, Bull Shoe intends to store a copy with a third party.

"That way they can't just push it out of sight," she said.

Bull Shoe said she's collected more

than the 2,500 signatures needed for the petition to succeed. But even if it were accepted, there's many questions left unanswered. Would an interim council be able to succeed after years of conflict and corruption? Will the BIA take a proactive stance to manage the tribe while a permanent council is found? Would the next council do what no council has done yet and usher in important reforms that break the council's grip on the reservation? The petition doesn't answer these questions. But for Bull Shoe and the people who have signed the petition, it's a glimmer of hope for the future.

Many rumors surround the petition. Some people think there is an agenda behind it or that it's a trick of one faction's design. Bull Shoe talks of people who've said they would be fired if their signatures were found on the petition. People are afraid. Pollock said her supervisor has asked about her role in the petition. She fears she could be fired over it. But they both say there isn't much choice.

"We have to do this," Bull Shoe said. "We are going to get this done no matter what."

Bull Shoe and Pollock have been driving across the reservation collecting signatures. Politics aren't their only obstacle. Some of the people Bull Shoe trusted with signature sheets have stopped returning her calls, and others have overestimated the number of signatures they've collected.

SHAWNEE ROSE Skunkcap

Momberg gets off of work at Head Start Early Child, and drives across Browning to visit her mom for a cup of coffee. Her mother, Robin Bear Child, lives in one of the newer houses on the government estates near the hospital.

Momberg works full time at Head Start, another program managed through the tribe. The program provides care and education for 200 children on the reservation. Like Pollock, Momberg's paychecks are handled through the tribe.

"Our last normal paycheck was in mid-November, and then we didn't get paid again until right before Christmas," Momberg said. "It's really stressful because I've got three kids and car payments and rent. To have to kind of lean on my mommy, that was really stressful."

To compound the problem, Momberg said it's hard not knowing how to budget out a check that won't come on time.

"It's hard to hang on to it, because it's like I don't want to spend this all right here and right now, I need to stretch it



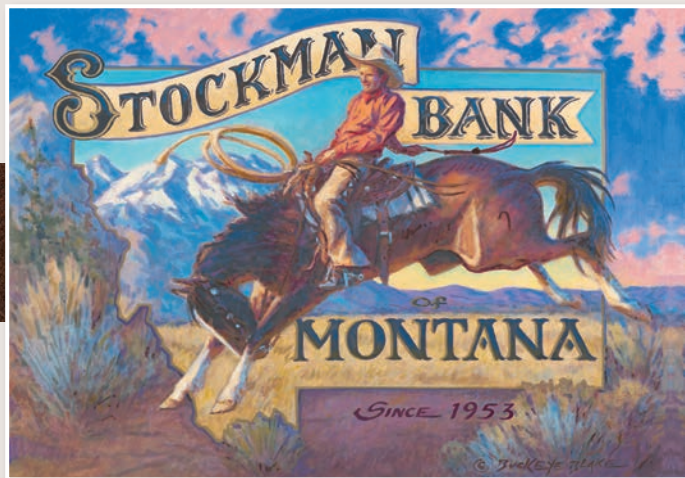
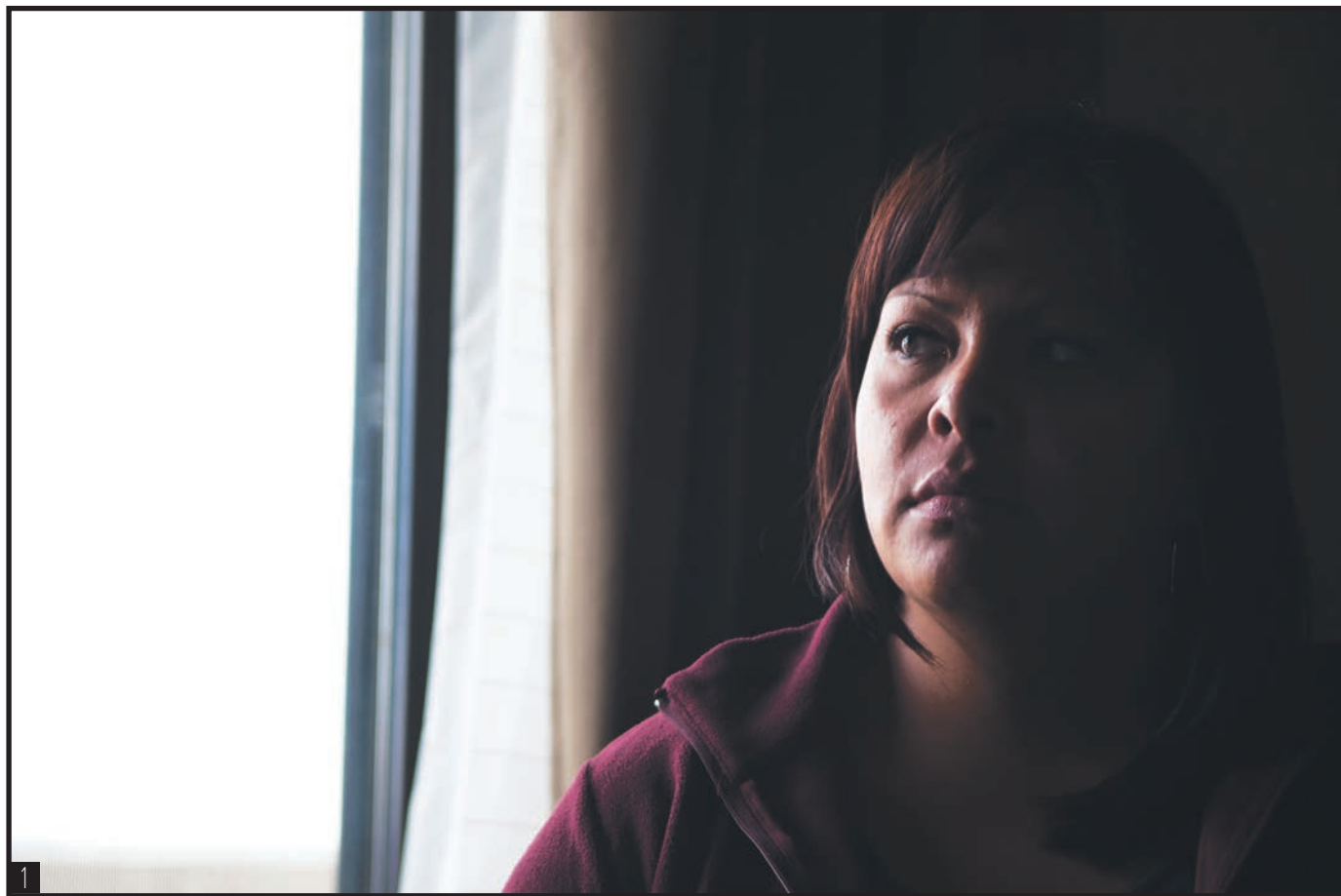
SHORTLY AFTER striking a temporary deal with Blackfeet Business Council Chairman Willie A. Sharp Jr. to pay tribal employees, councilmen Leonard Guardipee, left, and Roger Running Crane, center, talk with fired tribal employees at the Log Cabin Council headquarters at a closed cafe in Browning. Fifty five to 60 tribal employees were fired. The arrangement between councils held for one week.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

THE WRITE QUESTION

A Montana Public Radio literary program featuring authors from the western United States, including Henry Real Bird, Minerva Allen, Victor Charlo, Mardell Hogan Plainfeather, Julie Cajune and more.

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FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

out till I get the next hopeful payday,” Momberg said.

In January, the tribe failed to pay its low-income account with Glacier Electric Cooperative. As a result, some families went without power for two weeks before the tribe was able to settle the balance.

In February, the two council factions reached an agreement to keep the employees paid. The agreement was less than ideal for everyone. Employees fired by one side of the business council would continue to collect paychecks. Meanwhile, back pay for three council members who had been suspended for a year prior to the split would still be frozen.

Many have asked Momberg and other employees why they would still come to work when their paychecks don't come in.

“People were like, ‘Well, why are you even going to work? Everybody needs to ... walk out,’” Momberg said. “But if we don't go to work, there's 400 kids that we don't know if they're getting to eat or if they're going to have heat.”

She is skeptical of whether the Blackfeet political process can work: If a new council came in, there is little guarantee the same situation wouldn't develop again. With no separation of powers built into the political system, the Tribal Business

Council has absolute control over the judicial system, the law enforcement, and hiring and firing practices. And as with Anna Bull Shoe's petition, changes need to be approved by the tribal business council, which leave the people with no recourse when they step out of line.

“If you don't have a separation of powers, then you don't have a fair government,” said Joe McKay, an attorney in Browning. “There's no separation of powers, so they're right if they say they are.”

McKay filed an injunction in tribal court against the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council on April 30. The goal of the injunction was to halt the election process until a BIA-approved election board could be appointed. The tribal court struck it down, leaving McKay without legal options.

“My point today was to force them to have a legal election so we can move forward,” McKay said over the phone.

For many on the reservation, the only way to move past the political mess created over the past year is to hold a new election. With five vacant seats, it could break the political deadlock.

But there are complications. The Sharp faction, without a full quorum of elected council delegates, appointed the new election board, and the BIA have declared it illegal. Nevertheless, Sharp's election

board alleges the Running Crane faction has been trying to intimidate its members, a move the Running Crane side says is unfounded. The election board labeled Running Crane and his councilors as “opposition” and has refused to allow them to register for re-election. This prompted the BIA to issue another letter voicing concerns that the election may be biased.

The BIA has stated in several recent letters to Chairman Sharp that unless a new election board is appointed by quorum, the BIA will not recognize any newly elected councilors. In that case, only four members of the council will be BIA approved. There would be no legal quorum of six, and the tribe could endanger its government-to-government relationship with the U.S.

McKay said the consequences of this would be far-reaching. If this election isn't valid, then there would not be enough legally recognized councilors to have another election two years from now. The tribe would lose lucrative contracts. The BIA would be obligated to continue funding grants and programs, and tribal jobs would become BIA jobs.

“This could create a never-ending cycle of constitutional problems,” McKay said.

Despite misgivings about the election board, McKay is running for a council seat. He hopes to be able to enact consti-

tutional reform that will give the Blackfeet Constitution separation of powers.

He doubts Bull Shoe's petition would be effective because it would never make it past either version of the council.

“No one is going to say, ‘Oh yeah, there's a bunch of names here. Lets put ourselves up for re-election,’” McKay said.

The problems with the Blackfeet Constitution are not unique. In 1935, the BIA imposed constitutions upon many tribes. Tribes have been allowed to amend and reform their constitutions, but the Blackfeet haven't changed the document much over the years. The last push for reform was in 2010, and the council rejected it.

Dr. Ian Record, a managing director at the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy with the University of Arizona has been studying governmental conflicts in Indian Country for over a decade. The current Blackfeet turmoil isn't a unique situation, Record said.

“Often it is a system or a constitution that was imposed on the tribe, by an external actor, usually the federal government,” Record said. “While it's difficult, I think it would behoove the Blackfeet, and other nations who find themselves in these situations, to take a step back and think, ‘Is this really a leadership problem? Or is this an institution's problem?’”



The problem with the Blackfeet situation is the current system makes it hard for reforms to be implemented. Nevertheless, Record said the BIA shouldn't intervene in the turmoil.

“The reason that the Blackfeet, and so many other nations, find themselves in these governmental predicaments is precisely because the feds did get involved,”

Record said. “Because they said, ‘We know how you should govern yourselves, and this is the constitution you should use, and this is the way you should make decisions.’ And now Native nations are struggling with the legacy of that.”

Constitutional reform is the hope

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1) MISTEE RIDES At The Door was put on administrative leave after refusing to file a restraining order against Councilman Roger Running Crane on behalf of the Sharp faction.

2) THREE OF the seven Willie A. Sharp Jr. faction members, Cheryl Little Dog, left, Leon Vielle and Sharp, send out a live telecast to the Blackfeet Nation from tribal headquarters. The telecast was in response to tribal paychecks being late again. During the telecast, Vielle called the Log Cabin Council “extortionists” and “terrorists,” saying their corruption would not be tolerated and they would not bend to the Log Cabin Council's demands regarding paychecks. Shortly after, Sharp, Vielle and Little Dog talked with the Log Cabin Council and agreed to pay tribal employees.

3) ROGER RUNNING CRANE, center, talks with fired appellate Judge Julene Kennerly and Shawn Augare shortly after a deal was struck between the Log Cabin Council and the Sharp faction to pay tribal employees.

of many on the reservation. But with a questionable election in the future and political gridlock at the present, reform is a long way off, and the waiting isn't easy for the people caught in the middle.

ANNA BULL SHOE hoped to get more signatures for the petition from a friend in Heart Butte, 30 miles south of Browning, but when she arrived, he wasn't around. For Bull Shoe, this is a common thing. People say they've filled out the pages of signatures, but when she comes to collect, they aren't around or they'll say the pages are missing.

She doesn't let it spoil her day though. She decided to drive out to look at the home she and Pollock intend to move into over the summer. It's down a rough dirt road, nearly halfway between Heart Butte and Browning. She drives her Cadillac gingerly through the deep clay, coming to rest on top of a hill a quarter mile from the home.

"We'll have to walk from here," Anna said.

Walking past a decrepit building on the way, Anna begins to tell the history of the land. It belongs to a farmer who lives nearby, on the opposite side of the highway, she said. The house they're moving into is actually an old school building. While Anna talks, Pollock picks wild sage.

The large building is a bit of a fixer-upper. Parts of the roof have broken with age. Windows have had bricks thrown through them, probably by drunken teens. Birds moved into the attic, and, as a result, large sections of the floor below are covered in their waste.

While they've been living in Browning, Pollock and Bull Shoe have used the school building as a storage space. One room that used to serve as a gymnasium and for church sermons is now crowded with bags of belongings.

"See, here's where they used to wor-



ship," Bull Shoe said, lifting a large black bag off the floor to reveal a painting of a cross and two hands joined in prayer.

Getting the building to a livable state will take hard work and dedication. Friends and family have offered to help out when they can, but it will take effort, time and unity from many people to get the job done.

Like the building, Bull Shoe and Pollock think the tribal government is in need of repair, even though it's a massive undertaking for the people of the land.

Looking out the window across the still-dead-from-winter hills and trees, Bull Shoe remains hopeful the petition will

work. The election, she said, won't go far enough to fix the problems of the people.

"They're not good leaders," she said. "We need to get them all out. Then we could start again."

The greatest hope for Bull Shoe and Pollock is that the next council will reform the constitution and create a government that protects and listens to the people.

"We need separation of powers," Pollock said. "So that way the chairman and the council don't have so much power."

But even if Bull Shoe doesn't get the petition in, or if it fails to get past BIA scrutiny, she said she is still proud they have tried to fix the problems.

"Even if they kick it back, even if we don't get past the 2,500, that's still more people than what they had vote in the last

election," Bull Shoe said.

As the Sharp faction pushes forward with their election board, the Running Crane faction has once again suspended paychecks for tribal employees. As this story goes to print, paychecks have been withheld for two weeks on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation.

The Running Crane faction has said they will release paychecks only after a new election board is in place, and the Sharp faction has made no indication they are willing to compromise. So with nothing to break the political gridlock and only the hopes of an uncertain election on the horizon, the people of the Blackfoot tribe must wait. ▽



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2



3

1) ANNA BULL SHOE, left, Kila Bird and Anne Pollock visit the house they aim to move into by summer. In the coming months, Bull Shoe plans to renovate the house to make it livable for her family of eight.

2) POLICE TAPE and traffic cones remain after a roadblock preventing access to the front of the tribal headquarters building was partially removed to allow police access. Police officers and tribal employees in the building blamed an unknown man that was circling the block, allegedly trying to intimidate the election board appointed by the Sharp faction.

3) BLACKFEET TRIBAL Business Council candidate Nathan DeRoche, left, talks about tribal reform during a Blackfeet Against Corruption meeting. BAC is an activist group that supports the Sharp Faction.



MAJOR ROBINSON and his daughter Jorian watch the horses in the field next to their house. After 20 years of living and working as an architect around the world, Robinson moved back to his home on the Northern Cheyenne reservation where he owns and operates Redstone Consulting.

BETWEEN NATIONS

CHOOSING TO LIVE ON OR OFF RESERVATIONS

STORY BY KATHERYN HOUGHTON
PHOTOS BY LESLIE HITTMEIER

THE FADED black and white photo was the first clue Carol Gilham found that hinted at the two years her family lived in San Jose when they left behind their reservation life of Fort Peck located in the northeastern corner of Montana.

The photo, which has since been lost, was from 1958. She still remembers its yellowing edges faded into the image of Gilham as a toddler riding a carousel with her two older sisters. The ride looked new to Gilham, like they were at an amusement park or fair, but she couldn't quite tell.

She remembers studying the photo, its grey tones spun into bright colors as she imagined how the carousel must have been then.

Now, more than 40 years later, she remembers looking through the photos as a child from the living room of their home in Fort Peck, in which the floors sank every time she walked across its center.

The images showed a stark difference between the life she remembers, growing up on Montana's most remote reservation, the home of the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes, and the life she could have had in the city. They sparked her curiosity. Gilham wanted to know why they ever left Montana and why they ultimately came back.

She can't remember when or how she asked but she can vividly remember her mom's answer: Life in the city wasn't what it looked like.

Her mom described the Thanksgiving they didn't have any food, "not even baby formula for me," Gilham said. Her mom said while the weather seemed warm, she felt cold every night in the rows of tin dwelling units that Native Americans lived in.

When she got to the part of the story where an anonymous person left a frozen turkey on their doorstep with all of the season's fixings, Gilham said her mom began to cry. Though she never asked and her mom never said so, Gilham believed the tears came from the memory of finding unimposing generosity on their doorstep.

"They were all Native American and all poor for the most part," she said of the inter-tribal community within the city. "No matter where they were from, they made their own family because their home, their tribe, was so far way."

Much like Gilham's family, Native Americans face a constant conflict: A push to move into a city, go to school, find a job, perhaps start a family and a pull to stay on the reservation, where there's family and generations of support. The conflict is reasonable, tribal reservations are often impoverished and have unemployment rates well into the double digits. Urban areas are increasingly becoming rife with promise and opportunity.



DUSTIN MONROE is a Blackfoot Indian currently pursuing his graduate degree in public administration at the University of Montana. He is the founder of Native Generational Change, a nonprofit based in Missoula that aims to form a community model of governance. He hopes to one day make changes in federal and state policy that will strengthen the Native American voice.

IT TAKES 206 miles of highway and nearly four hours for Dustin Monroe to return to his Browning home, the Blackfoot Nation.

Monroe's life has always been split between the reservation and Montana cities.

"A social barrier formed, like I wasn't accepted in either world," he said. "In the city I was a brown kid with a 'rez' accent but when we returned to the reservation I was a white kid just because I went to school in Great Falls."

Now a University of Montana graduate student pursuing a degree in public administration, Monroe said he initially felt like he had to pick a side — Native American or urban.

"It comes down to this tension. How Indian am I?" he said. "Many believe if they leave the reservation they are turning their back on their people."

People are drawn off reservations because of instability, he said. Tribal government has a high turn around rate, which can lead to economic uncertainty because the majority of jobs are tied to tribal government.

A first generation college graduate, Monroe said he now has an even stronger

sense of responsibility to Native Americans, collectively, not just those from his tribe.

While the majority of Native Americans have moved to cities, federal government policy has not followed suit, he said.

"The representation is not there yet," Monroe said. "I felt like I had to do something because I'm tired of waiting on my reservation, I'm tired of waiting on leaders."

In response, Monroe founded Native Generational Change, a Missoula-based nonprofit that aims to form a community model of governance. Instead of relying on tribal politics or federal funding, Monroe said he believes change needs to come from individuals working together.

He hopes to one day create policy change at a state and federal level to strengthen the voice of Native Americans.

For now, Monroe's business meetings take place in coffee houses where he and volunteers try to address modern-day concerns for Native Americans, as opposed to thinking of them as a product of historical tragedy.

He is working on the Playground Restoration Project, an effort to build vibrant, safe playgrounds on the poorest parts of Montana reservations.

The main question among Native Americans shouldn't be where they live but how they can maintain their cultural identity, he said. In fact, his work has helped Monroe come to terms with the conflict that buffeted him as a "white boy with a rez accent."

"I choose both," he said. "I can help my people from anywhere whether that is from within reservations or Missoula."

IN THE LAST 20 years Major Robinson reinvented his career three times, moved to 10 different cities and traveled across continents.

"I grew up hearing from my parents and tribal leaders, 'Go get a formal education then come home to share your skills,'" Robinson said. "No matter where I went it was in my thoughts."

Robinson placed his hand on the beam that had supported the weight of the two story wooden tepee that stood on the Northern Cheyenne reservation since 1931. It was one of the key parts of the landmark he wanted to save. Light and wind filtered through the cracks of the structure.

"I remember as a kid, it was a meeting

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

12

ground for my people to share our stories and history," Robinson said.

Robinson tilted his head as he began to describe the blueprint in his mind. He moved his left hand to follow the curve of the teepee — they would build a staircase to follow the wall up to the second story, which could be used as a gift shop. The first floor would be a story telling room again.

His eyes followed the paths left by his memories. He pointed through a hole in the wall to a log cabin across the street. Many people believe the cabin was the first building on the reservation. To Robinson, it is where his parents and nine other siblings would stop by and get candy on special occasions — it would also need to be restored.

Though Robinson had always been encouraged to come home, when he finally did people treated him with hesitance.

"When you come home, people look at you like, 'You're going to take my job' and they were fearful that I was here to take away something that they had — and I never looked at it that way, I wasn't here to take anyone's job, I was here to create another opportunity."

A few miles down the road Robinson parked his Hummer outside the Lame Deer tribal courthouse. He hopes to unite the courthouse with the law enforcement offices

and adult jail, each of which sit separately, into one new building.

To the right of the offices, a tree's shadow falls on an empty lot. It's where his childhood home once stood. It was a two-room building for 10 people. It had no running water. Robinson shared a bed with three siblings.

"It is strange, working where I can see my childhood, my personal history everywhere," he said. "But it feels good to be contributing to the place I grew up."

Robinson, 55, started Redstone Consulting on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in 2007 as a way to break back into the workforce on his reservation and create opportunities for other Native Americans to find employment.

Robinson has been on every Montana reservation to work on projects such as water infrastructures, tribal centers, detention centers and community buildings. His buildings often reflect the desert-red of the landscape and the light blue of his tribe's color. He uses natural wood to mirror the tribe's spiritual connection to the outdoors.

Robinson left the Northern Cheyenne reservation at 18 for Montana State University to major in theatre arts. At first he couldn't relate to the other students or his teachers and often made the five hour drive home just to feel what it was like to belong. But that anxiety didn't last. Robinson began



ONE OF THREE wooden teepees built in 1931 still stands in Busby. Major Robinson, an architect, was invited by the residents of Busby to help make a master plan to renovate the structure and make it part of a new campground that will be called Custer's Last Camp.

to crave the unknown and wanted to see what it was like, first outside the reservation, then eventually outside of Montana.

He dropped out of college his sophomore year and joined a multicultural acting troupe, with which he travelled through 20

countries in one year. But at the same time he was filled with a sense of guilt, leaving school felt like he had given up on his tribe and family.

He returned to college to study architecture, a field that would allow him to

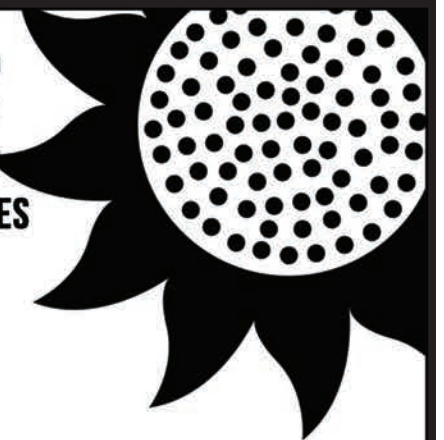
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physically design and construct his ideas. He didn't know where the job would lead him, but knew it could be applied anywhere.

After graduation he spent his days designing theme parks in Los Angeles by day and trying to pursue his acting passion in movie audition rooms at night. However his designs drew attention from a Japanese theme park so he set out for Tokyo.

"I went just about as far away from my reservation as possible, not because I was escaping, but because I just wanted to see and do more," he said. "But home was always the end goal.

He eventually ended up in Florida, working for Universal Studios, where he met his wife, Michelle.

After being away from the reservation for over a decade, Robinson's tug to bring what he had learned back to his tribe grew too strong to ignore. It was time to go home.

In 2006, Robinson moved to the same view he had as a 14-year-old, only this time he had a wife, three kids and no defined role to play on his reservation.

Robinson started Redstone Consulting in Billings, but focused on projects in the nearby Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations. He had little competition from other businesses and a workforce that, for the most part, had no intention of moving.

Since returning home, Robinson has co-founded the Montana Indian Business Alliance, the Montana Tribal Tourism Alliance and the People's Partners for Community Development and helped form the Indian Nonprofit Alliance. He has also been a member of the State-Tribal Economic Development Commission and the Governor's American Indian Nations Council.

Philip Belangie, the manager for the Indian Entrepreneur Program said many people attempt to explain the poverty of the reservations by pointing to corruption, alcoholism or school-dropout rates. However, those are just symptoms the government has too much influence over the economy, he said.

"If the private sector is not chosen within Indian Country, the only alternative is poverty," Belangie said. "It's just true."

For a business to be successful two things are needed, start-up funds and property, neither of which are common on reservations.

Over 80 percent of start-up businesses get their funding from personal savings, family members or friends, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. For most people living on reservations that form of funding is just not existent, Belangie said.

Even if they could afford it, legislation has made it hard for people to find places to put their businesses.



MAJOR ROBINSON talks about his plan to renovate a wooden teepee in Busby. "Maybe we will build a staircase along that wall up to the second floor, use the first floor as a story telling room and the second as a shop," he said. "We will paint it the colors of Northern Cheyenne: light blue for the people and burnt orange for the landscape."

Under the 1887 Dawes Act, land could be allotted to individual Native Americans. But by 1934 so much land had been privatized that Congress reversed course and communal tribal property was back in favor.

Today the vast majority of land on reservations is held communally which leads to what economists termed the tragedy of the commons: If everyone owns the land, no one does.

"The challenges of forming businesses on reservations should not deter people from trying," Robinson said. "It's important for those who come after us."

The tribe's future generations wouldn't have to leave to find work if job diversity and stability were to grow on reservations, Robinson said. A business community is the first step to creating the environment for progress in reservations.

"There are plenty of opportunities to grow what we have here," he said. "It is hard, but extremely possible. That development means more tribal members can be employed, and those who have left can come home to work here again."

THE SECOND time Carol Gilham left Fort Peck was 38 years ago, this time as an adult. She describes herself as a product of urban relocation, the federal program that promised career training, financial aid and a one-way ticket to a major urban location to Native Americans, including Gilham's parents.

While she doesn't remember her family's experience in San Jose, it instilled in her a pull toward adventure.

"When I left, it was never a question of choosing between a reservation and a city,

or because of the poverty on my reservation, it was all about where to go next — everything felt possible."

Gilham said when her parents left, they were probably also looking for an adventure and a job other than working as a teacher, bartender or farmer.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs-sponsored Voluntary Relocation Program lasted from 1952-1973 and successfully drew over 100,000 Native Americans to about five

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FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

14

primary urban locations, according to a 2013 documentary, "Urban Rez."

Montana Native Americans greatly ignored the program and stayed home, at first.

In 1957, the Billings Gazette reported 544 Montana Native Americans participated in the program that year alone, an increase from the previous year by more than 300 people.

The program was masked as a tool to help Native Americans flee from poverty,

but in actuality it was tied to an effort known as the period of termination, said David Beck, a University of Montana Native American Studies professor.

The Urban Relocation Program was designed to reduce the Federal Government's legal obligations to tribes, as well as

assimilate Native Americans into the blur of the "ideal American culture," he said.

Beck said the relocation program was introduced to the great-grandchildren of those who had been forced off their land. However, it was still appealing to Native Americans because of scarcity on reservations.

"They were looking for an escape, for a chance to determine their own careers and lives," Beck said.

The product was success and the market was young families. But, according to her mother, Gilham's family found different results.

After two harsh years of poverty and separation from their family, Gilham's parents were drained of their sense of adventure and they longed for their reservation. Her father borrowed money from his parents to move back to Fort Peck and decided to become a farmer so he could still create his own destiny.

As an adult, Gilham felt a similar pull to the reservation. She felt a gap between her family and her tribe.

"I do feel bad about the fact my kids, and now grandkids, are somewhat separate from their culture," she said. "They, and younger generations like them, don't know that history unless they make the point of seeking it out in this busy world."

After meeting her husband, the couple moved to Fort Peck where Gilham taught high school for four years. She eventually moved to Billings and secured a job as an accounting officer with the BIA, to the surprise of her parents.

"I knew I was working for this organization that wasn't friendly to my parents and it felt like I was a traitor," she said. "But I had all these ideas that I could at least do my part to really help Indian people, however naive it seemed at the time."

The BIA is also a place for Native Americans to use their educations to work from cities for their people, she said.

Helping Native Americans from her Billings home is how Gilham stays connected to her culture. The memories of her life growing up with a ranching father, a small home filled with family members and a love for Montana will always be a part of who she is.

"Whenever I hear an Indian drum it takes me back to my childhood," she said. "When I smell the mix of sweetness and earth, I am brought back to the reservation. I know where I am from – I know I am a Native American." ▽



MAJOR ROBENSON stands in front of the new Northern Cheyenne Utilities Center in Lame Deer. Roberson helped turn what was once a swimming pool changing room into a new facility for utility workers. He also brought on many Northern Cheyenne tribal members in need of work to help remodel the building.

THE OLD Northern Cheyenne Utilities Center stands abandoned in Lame Deer. The building provided terrible working conditions for employees due to lack of heat and windows. The new utilities center, constructed by Roberson, provides a quality facility for workers.





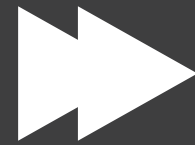
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JOHN PEPION draws during a ledger art demonstration in the main exhibit room at the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in Great Falls. His work is featured on the wall along with several other ledger artists from the Northwest. Pepion said he produces about 30 pieces a month to strengthen his skills in art.

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

AUDIO FEATURES FROM THE NATIVE ARTS SCENE

BY RUTH EDDY, CHRISTOPHER ALLEN
PHOTOS AND VIDEO BY SEABORN LARSON

THE ART WORLD has a love/hate relationship with labels. Music genres are created and subcategorized into hundreds of labels that cue listeners but put artists in boxes with expectations. The label “Native American artist” is no different.

But there are plenty of men and women in Montana who consistently defy what the mainstream categorizes as Native American art. Some artists harness their identity to shape and inform their work, while others consider it an afterthought.

Native American art doesn't mean feathers and drums, although it could, and these audio stories are about people challenging those stereotypes while still receiving accolades and attention for their work.

LEDGER ART



DWAYNE WILCOX STANDS outside his home in Rapid City, South Dakota. He has transformed his basement into a studio where he says he has all the space he needs. He lives with his wife, Felicia. Wilcox has enjoyed more time at home in recent years, spending less time on the road exhibiting his art.

Ledger drawings are making more appearances in galleries and museums across Montana. Young artists like John Pepion craft unpretentious and colorful images on antique paper, which harkens back to the 19th century. Ledger art veterans like Dwayne Wilcox seek a fresh perspective, creating images with modern style and satire. But ultimately, both men feel the same pressure: To create ledger art that both inspires and sells.

LITERATURE

STERLING HOLY-WHITEMOUNTAIN reads from the book “Off the Path: An Anthology of 21st Century Montana American Indian Writers, Vol.1” during a public presentation of the book at the Payne Family Native American Center at the University of Montana. Holywhitemountain grew up on the Blackfeet reservation and is featured in the book.



A majority of the literature published about Native Americans was not written by Native Americans. Those who do write about their own experiences in fiction or poetry often have a hard time getting published. The stories that do get published often stick to stereotypes of Native Americans as mystical and spiritual beings, ignoring the varied reality of life on reservations today. Adrian Jawort is a contemporary Native American author who didn't let publishing rejections stop him. He started his own publishing company, invited his friends Sterling Holywhitemountain and Luella Brien to submit stories and published “Off the Path.” For most of the authors this anthology contains their first published work. Holywhitemountain and Brien say they hope their publishing can inspire other young writers to tell their own stories.

MUSIC



JOEY RUNNING CRANE performs his final show at the VFW in Missoula with Goddammitboyhowdy, one of his three musical groups. Running Crane was a pivotal figure of the VFW music venue, organizing events and shows for musical acts during the last three years.

Native American music gets a fair amount of attention in the media, sometimes when it shouldn't. Drums or flutes are heard in almost every story done about Native Americans, however rarely do the stories focus on the music or the people who make it. Kevin Kickingwoman makes music. He has been singing Blackfeet songs since he was a kid, and now hosts a weekly two-hour radio show featuring the music of the Plains Indians. Joey Running Crane is also a Blackfeet singer, but he's likely to be seen performing his self-described "rez punk" at a local bar more than any pow wow.

FILM



BROOKE SWANEY'S most recent film, "OK Breathe Auralee," was featured in the 2012 Sundance Film Festival. The honor helped her earn the 2014 Native Arts & Cultures Foundation film fellowship grant to complete her next project: a documentary following the actress who starred as Auralee. The project is in pre-production.

For every controversy in the media regarding the appropriation of Native American imagery in film, there are filmmakers and actors who aren't waiting around for Hollywood to catch up. Brooke Swaney, filmmaker, and Joseph Grady, actor, share Montana tribal roots, but also seek to address contemporary issues in movies. Rather than see studios cast big-time actors in Native American roles, they push for authenticity, even if it means fewer ticket sales.

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GERALDINE DONEY sits with students while they brush their teeth during quiet time at the Fort Belknap Head Start.

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FORT BELKNAP ELDERS PIVOTAL IN WITNESSING,
PASSING DOWN EVOLVING TRIBAL CULTURE

STORY BY ASHLEY NERBOVIG
PHOTOS BY MEGHAN NOLT

THE EIGHT children paid almost no mind to the elderly woman sitting in the classroom. She barely moved, while sitting at the head of the long table with the students. Occasionally she'd focus on an unruly child before looking off back into the distance. The teacher wandered around the room, warning the students several times to be quiet.

When it came time for the children to practice writing their names, the old woman leaned forward to help them form their letters. She could reach the closest two students, while the rest were left to the roaming teacher. She rarely engaged the children beyond that. Her movements were slow, and most of the time she acted only as a surrogate for the teacher, who was overrun by yelling children.

The teacher turned off the lights in the classroom calling for quiet, and Geraldine Doney, 88, reminded the boy sitting closest to her to quiet down, before returning to her role as classroom observer. The boy settled for a moment, but it wasn't long before he had to be warned again, now by the teacher, to keep still and be quiet. Doney didn't look at the boy, even though he returned to squirming after only a few minutes. Doney, who has been with the program for 17 years, is one of six foster grandparents working at Fort Belknap Agency's headstart program.

The foster grandparent program is a national organization with the goal of connecting children to the life experiences of older members of their community. However, watching Doney, it appears her role is closer to that of a teacher's aide than to an educator.

"The kids seem different than when I first started," Doney said. "They seemed eager to learn when I first started."

She said she doesn't relate to the younger generation anymore. Many of them have to be forced to learn to participate in tribal culture; receiving treats or prize money for learning and participating in traditional dances. She said her own upbringing differs too much from the children of today, who she thinks don't have enough of an elder's influence in their lives.

Doney said she doesn't feel like she can share stories with the children like her elders did with her when she was a child. As more people age into the role of "elder," some believe their culture and

way of life is becoming diluted.

However, the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre tribes on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation are utilizing several programs to introduce the lifelong experiences of elders into class curricula. They hope this will balance students' contemporary lessons with traditional teachings.

CHERYL MORALES, a professor at the Aaniiih Nakoda College on Fort Belknap, focuses on teaching traditional plant usage and medicinal plant application. Knowledge came from other elders and from reading. She said her mother was one of many Native American parents who never shared very much of her culture.

"My mother, I don't know what she knew of her culture," Morales said. "It was so ingrained in her not to teach it, so (her) children didn't get hurt. I'm trying to learn the plants, but I didn't learn much from her."

She said a lot of her knowledge came from her aunt who learned it from Morales' grandmother.

"There are those gaps where families decided not to hand it down," Morales said. "This idea that you may still suffer from knowledge."

Morales said many students were left at boarding schools until they graduated, or until they learned a skill. And those kids' families lost much of their tradition.

John Allen, executive director of the housing department at Fort Belknap Housing Authority, said these children were lucky if they learned about their traditions at home. The treatment of Native American children at the boarding schools led many parents to hide or disregard their own culture for fear their children would be ridiculed by their teachers. This stereotype perpetuated from the first generation of parents at the boarding schools, leading to several generations of families either practicing their traditions in secret or not at all.

Allen said he was lucky this wasn't the case for him. His family practiced the tradition of sending the oldest son to live with his grandparents. He used to go with his grandfather and would follow

him around learning how to conduct a proper sun dance and powwow.

Doney learned about the sun dances from her grandmother. She remembered seeing scars on her grandmother's chest where she was pierced and tied to a pole and would dance and bleed for three days to cleanse her spirit.

Doney said she never learned the Assiniboine language, though her mother could speak it fluently. This was partly due to her mother's lack of time and partly due to Doney being "tongue tied" when she tried to learn. But she got by and learned slowly. However, when she was sent to the local boarding school, the language of her people was finally lost to her.

Doney had only been in the school about a year before one of the nuns hit her for asking a question in Assiniboine.

"I remember my mother asking the nun, 'You hit that little girl?'" Doney said. "After my mother heard about that, she pulled me out."

Doney's experience at the boarding

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



KNOWN AS "Grandma Bunny," Rosemary Peak, right, ties Shaydyn Blount's shoe at Ramona King Head Start. Blount is the granddaughter of Philomene Hawley, center.



1



2

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

schools is mild compared to some of the treatment students received at schools across the nation. According to a 2007 report, "Native Words, Native Warriors," from the National Museum for American Indians, the children there "were not only taught to speak English but were punished for speaking their own languages ... They were taught that their cultures were inferior."

In a report drafted by the superintendent of the Fort Belknap boarding school in 1895, the education of the Native American children at the school focused on literature and music. However, the largest section describes manual labor, which was the primary focus at the time.

"Details are carefully made out each

month so that during the year each boy receives instruction in all kinds of work incident to a farm and each girl receives instruction in all kinds of housework. At present the school has a garden containing 12 acres. Two boys have been apprenticed as carpenters and two as blacksmiths during the year. The girls have received instruction in all kinds of housework such as cooking, laundry, work of sick and sewing. Many of them are able to cut, fit and make their own clothes."

MINERVA ALLEN, 78, is an elder of high standing within the Fort Belknap community and has published several books on the culture of the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre tribes. She occasionally works with the students in Morales' class-



3

1) GERALDINE DONEY shows kids at Fort Belknap Head Start how to write their names. Doney often gets frustrated with the young kids because she says they lack patience and won't sit still. "Some of them listen," she said. "That makes a difference. That's OK with me."

2) GERALDINE DONEY helps Gregory Gardipee write his name at Fort Belknap Head Start. As a volunteer, Doney is an extra set of eyes and hands to help teach the kids. She says the kids today aren't as eager to learn as they were when she started at the school.

3) MINERVA ALLEN speaks to a class at Aaniiih Nakoda College about the traditional uses and health benefits of various plants. Allen coordinates programs at the senior center in Lodge Pole and is a published author. Her book "Nakoda Sky People" is a compilation of Allen's poems, Nakoda words and phrases, Native recipes and herbal medicines.

room at the tribal college. During one of those evenings this spring, Minerva set up Ziploc baggies containing plant samples in a corner of the room and handed out packets of information with details on the plants and their different uses.

Before the class, Morales asked the students to tell her which plants they are growing in the green house on campus. The five students in the class each mentioned one to two plants, naming common things like lavender and peppermint plants, as well as more exotic ones, from marshmallow to yakta to sagebrush.

Minerva is part of a program at the Aaniiih Nakoda College, which brings elders in the community to come teach in the science, technology, engineering and math classes. The program hopes to merge modern education with tribal traditions.

As the students talked, Minerva attempted to set up the television to play a PowerPoint presentation.

"Anyone know how to work that thing?" Minerva asked the class. "How do you turn it on? Or move it? Oh, with the mouse, huh?"

Halfhearted, some of the students attempted to direct her. Others didn't

even look up from the papers in front of them. It wasn't until Morales returned that the lecture continued.

"All tribes are medicine people," the elder told the students. She read directly from sheets she brought to class. As she did, a few students checked their phones. One doodled on a piece of paper, slightly hidden from Minerva's gaze. However as the lecture continued, Minerva began to lose the monotone professor lecturing voice and started to simply tell stories of when the plants were used in the past.

She told of how gumweed once was used to cure venereal diseases and which plants hunters would use while traveling to cure things like urinary tract infections. The students perked up occasionally at these stories. While no one asked questions, their eyes locked on Minerva, and their hands circled images on their papers, annotating them with details from the stories she told.

Morales said she always tells her students, this is the time to ask the elders these questions. The knowledge is untapped and there for the taking. Morales said she hopes her generation won't make the mistake of the past one and allow any of the knowledge still living with these

elders to go to waste.

"I tell my students that traditional plants were the medicine of our time," Morales said. "That modern medicine does not have the same properties as the natural plants. Pharmaceutical companies take one active ingredient which targets the disease and leave the one that heals the body. The Indian people know which way is better."

Morales is disappointed she never had the education directly from her grandmother, but she is glad to provide this opportunity for her students. To give them the chance to learn their culture before yet another generation dies with knowledge still left to be passed down.

SEAN CHANDLER, director of the college's American Indian Studies department, brought elders into classes with help from the school's dean. He hopes by bringing in these elders, even students who did not grow up with a strong elder presence in their lives will be able to learn some of the traditions.

In the past, many of the elders were willing to come and speak with the students about how to integrate the elders' knowledge with modern science. Howev-

er, the program has also experienced the loss of most of its active elders, including Joe Iron Man, who died in June 2013. Chandler described these deaths as a heavy loss for the tribe.

Chandler listened to elders from a young age and said he learned the language from his grandparents and parents. He said many of the elders he works with come from families who worked hard to preserve their culture.

"They're good role models, their experience," Chandler said. Many elders grew up with their grandparents and learned much in the way of natural science. "(They learned) to pick the right plants and preparing foods. They could travel in the dark and look into the stars to find their way home. Sometimes people think that Native people weren't scientific, in modern terms, but we laid the foundation for a very scientific society."

Chandler believes the foundation for their college is to bring that knowledge out of the elders and ensure it continues to be taught.

Some of the knowledge was lost in the past, however. He said the elders living

today are descended from parents who also attended boarding schools.

“There’s not one reason for this loss,” Chandler said. “The influence of this Euro-American society, the boarding school system broke down a lot of those relationships between elders and their children. It’s all evolved into today. Just the influence of our culture in our local schools, we might figure out a way to make it important again by helping students realize who they really are.”

He has hope. Chandler said the biggest problem he sees is people can’t get the elders to talk about what they know. He said he often starts talking to an elder, and, just by listening, they remember things they thought were long gone.

Chandler said sometimes he doesn’t feel the confidence to carry on all that tradition or that he will be able to carry the culture with him when he becomes an elder. But he also believes it is the same way for every generation, that the current elders must have felt the same way when their elders were dying.

“You have to have a vast amount of knowledge, wisdom, guidance,” Chandler said. “Maybe not all old people could be considered elders, not in the way that they are knowledgeable of the cultural ways, but they’re still an elder.”

GERALD STIFFARM motions from east to west with his forearm. His face is stoic as he gestures it slowly to symbolize the sun’s journey across the sky. The dusty light comes in from his window facing the gravel parking lot with soft Top 40 music coming from his radio.

“The east, the direction the sun comes from, it represents newborn life,” Stiffarm said. He draws a circle on a piece of printer paper, his ballpoint pen scratching out the words “Love” and “Courage” next to animal names and different characteristics of life stages.

“You are not an elder until you have seen your children’s children have a child,” Stiffarm said. “Then you have seen a completion of the four quadrants.”

Stiffarm is of the old mind of elders in the Fort Belknap community. His infor-

mation was passed down to him from his grandparents and parents but also from research and books. He believes much of the culture of his people was lost during the assimilation of native culture into “white” culture.

Stiffarm views the elders of the community as people who should still be sought out for information and the backbone of the Fort Belknap community.

Doney came from a family with a strong elder presence. She felt connected to her grandparents, often more than her own mother, who she said thrust a lot of responsibility on Doney to be a caretaker in the home, even at a very young age. Because of this, her grandmother became like a mother to her in many ways. Her grandmother lived with her for a short time before she died.

“She would lay on the couch with her blanket up to her neck, and all that you would see is her pipe sticking out of her mouth,” Doney said.

But many things were lost for her, as she was too young for her grandmother to pass on some of the greater traditions.

“Me and some other kids were told

not to go down to my grandmother’s house one evening,” Doney said. “But we went down and we were peeking through a window, and there were all these people surrounding this old man. He was chanting, and in front of him was a pipe. As he chanted, the pipe began to tilt up right. We were so scared, we ran away from the window.”

So even though Doney’s grandmother was alive during the time when Fort Belknap’s native culture was rich, Doney doesn’t know the secret to some of the older traditions.

For Doney, her clearest memories of the two of them are sitting together by the creek and enjoying the sounds of the water, just her and her grandmother’s little stove to keep them warm. Doney would sit there for hours as her grandmother puffed on her pipe, occasionally sharing stories with Doney, but mainly they sat in silence together.

“It was just how it was back then,” Doney said. “I just respected her was all. I knew from the time I was little you were supposed to respect your elders. I knew that much.” ▽

1) PHILOMENE HAWLEY, known as “Grandma Tootsie” to the kids, volunteers at the Ramona King Head Start in Hays. The 92-year-old is the longest-serving member in the St. Vincent Healthcare Foster Grandparents Program at 29 years.

2) ANTONE RIDER helps his great-grandfather, Gilbert Horn, 90, remove the headset that helps him hear. Horn moved from his home in Fort Belknap Agency to Northern Montana Care Center in Havre in February 2013.

3) GILBERT HORN, 90, spends many days sitting on his bed watching TV. His hearing has deteriorated over the years, but he likes watching the moving pictures. Horn was a member of Merrill’s Marauders, a World War II unit known for its mission that penetrated Japan-occupied Burma. He also served as a code talker.



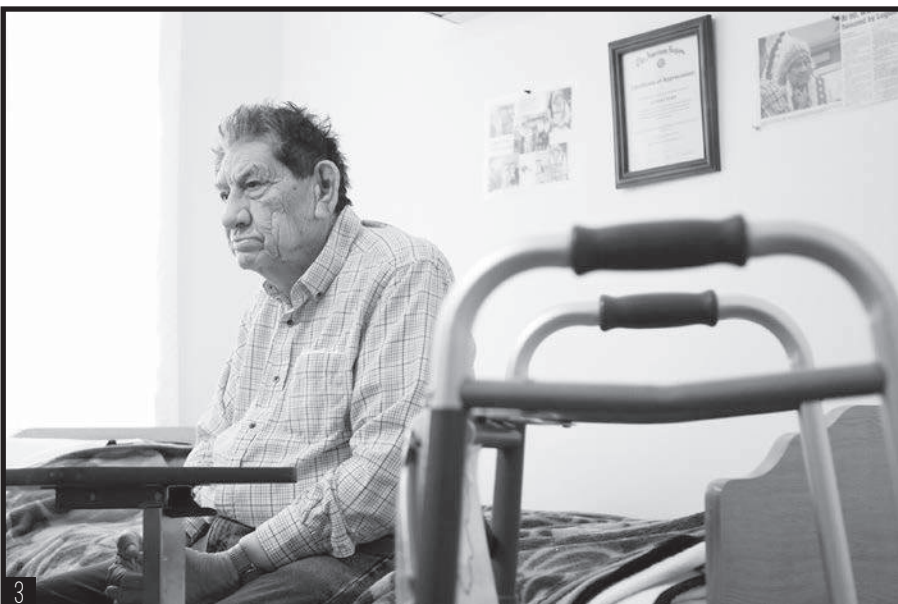


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HIS SERVICE WITH MERRILL'S MARAUDERS

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LOUISE ANDREW, left, and Catherine Andrew, right, laugh while sharing a story about their youth. As children, the sisters studied at the Ursuline Academy of St. Ignatius. They didn't know very much English when they started. One day, Catherine's teacher asked her to go check the time on the big clock in the hallway. Petrified, Catherine went to look. She came back and said the only number she knew, "44."

NOT TRANSLATABLE

ON THE FLATHEAD RESERVATION, RECORDING
THE KOOTENAI WORLDVIEW IN ITS OWN WORDS

STORY BY KEVIN DUPZYK
PHOTOS BY KATE SIBERELL

IT'S A SPRING Monday in Elmo, and a small gathering of people are ready to hear Adeline Mathias tell a story.

Mathias' voice speaks, a slight static fuzz behind her Kootenai words. Then linguist Dorothy Berney clicks pause with the computer mouse. Silence.

Catherine Andrew translates the digital recording of Mathias' voice: "It isn't going to be a fairy tale; it's going to be a true story."

Berney types the translation into her chunky black laptop.

Catherine and her sister Louise Andrew help Berney transcribe Mathias' storytelling. It's slow, painstaking work, but the elderly sisters enjoy it. No one speaks Kootenai like Mathias anymore.

The meeting place is a small trailer between Elmo's large green community hall and a retirement home. Inside is a mix of workspace and the comforts of home: two offices, a conference table, a whiteboard, a small kitchen, a couch and armchairs, a big-screen TV. Most everyone is settled into the couch and armchairs.

Mathias' great-grandson, Daniel Stiffarm, sits at a computer nearby, headphones on, jagged lines of sound waves unfurling across the monitor in front of him.

Another few words from Mathias. Catherine and Louise talk; Berney types. The story is about a hunting party. This goes on for four hours. By the end of the day's session, a few minutes of storytelling have been transcribed.

The Andrew sisters are two of the few remaining speakers for whom Kootenai is their first language. Younger generations only hear the language on occasion and speak with degraded pronunciation and little nuance. So the sisters and another woman, Alice Hewankorn, meet regularly with Berney to translate and transcribe old recordings of people like Mathias, who spoke Kootenai as her primary language.

Preserving speakers means new learners will be able to hear Kootenai as it has always been spoken, even when the people who have always spoken it are gone. Otherwise, Kootenai may survive — but it may not truly be Kootenai.

THIS PARTICULAR Monday is St. Patrick's Day, and Catherine and Berney discuss how to say "Ireland" in Kootenai. As an approximation for "Emerald Isle," they coin a Kootenai

word for "Green Island." But the word for "something that is green" can also mean "watermelon." A direct translation back to English might lose something, but in Kootenai, it makes sense.

Catherine and Louise squabble over who is older, and by how much. Catherine is the younger of the two. She walks taller and has fewer lines on her face.

Many of the recordings are of Louise and Catherine's mother, Mary Andrew. As a little girl, Louise saw her tell her stories. She would sit on the bed in her mother's room, watching her beading and talking into a recorder.

"When I first heard her tape, it tore me up inside," Catherine says. "Two, three times I heard her voice, and it's just like she's right here sitting with me."

The sisters have an arrangement with Berney, who is not a tribal member but has been employed by the Kootenai Culture Committee for nearly two decades. The linguist sits in one armchair, with her laptop. Catherine sits in the other, Louise on the couch opposite, computer speakers in between.

When Berney plays a short clip of Kootenai from her laptop, the Andrew

sisters repeat it back so she can transcribe it in Kootenai. Then they determine the best English rendering. The goal is to produce an accurate transcription in both languages.

In the 1970s, the culture committee simply tried to record the elders' memories. Now the recordings are the best record of the language on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

In Mathias' story, the hunting party is just a few miles outside Elmo, near Sullivan Hill, known in Kootenai as "monster's backbone." The monster is dead; Louise says you used to be able to see its blood on the hillside.

"You can't see it anymore. It's faded."

Catherine explains that the monster lived in Flathead Lake, which used to be called Monster Lake. She tries to remember the exact details of its demise.

"What was it, a bird?" she asks her sister. "A bird or something got jealous. His wife would pick huckleberries and come down here and feed that monster. He caught on, so he went and he killed that monster. I think it's a whale, a great big thing."

In the story, Catherine tells of how

the monster left the lake to die, and its carcass is what is now called Sullivan Hill. "Suyapi, white people, call it 'Sullivan,'" she said.

Night falls on the characters in Mathias' story. A snow starts. After each short clip, the sisters talk Kootenai back and forth, laughing at the things Mathias says.

Berney explains that Kootenai words are often formed by combining distinct units, which can result in strange translations. "The literal pieces means, 'That snow was ugly looking.'"

In other words, the snowstorm grew fierce.

The sisters tap their hands or feet while listening. Kootenai is rhythmic, musical even. The hard percussive sounds of consonants combine with slurred l's and lengthy vowels to create polyrhythms that last for words, sentences, whole stories.

As with any language, each speaker sounds unique, conjuring different moods with the stretch of their words and the severity of their glottal stops. For 80-year-old ears that don't hear the language as often as they'd like, it can be hard to

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ALICE HEWANKORN and linguist Dorothy Berney puzzle over Berney's collected "language scraps," the notes she makes whenever she hears a new Kootenai word or phrase. Berney speaks Kootenai and continues to learn the subtleties of the language through the transcription process.



DANIEL STIFFARM isn't fluent in Kootenai, but he probably hears the most out of anyone on the Flathead Indian Reservation, because his work entails digitizing old recordings of Kootenai speakers. As a hunter, he is personally connected to the language through traditional place names on the reservation.

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

understand. The Andrews sometimes ask Berney to replay clips. Sometimes they need her to help them recall the right words.

The irony that a non-tribal member plays such a crucial role in the language efforts is not lost on Catherine.

"Took a white woman to straighten it out," she said after a particularly difficult passage.

LANGUAGE LOSS is not unique to Kootenai. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2011 that the 169 Native North

American languages it tracks have only about 375,000 total speakers; the 10 most prominent languages account for about three-quarters of them. The Ethnologue, a language reference affiliated with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, classifies 140 languages in the US as "dying." Most of these belong to Native American tribes.

Vernon Finley, who occupies the office next to Berney, is working on language efforts of a different sort. In May 2013, a bill introduced by State Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy passed, initiating the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program. Each tribal government in the

state was awarded money to take on language projects. Working for the Kootenai Culture Committee, Finley wrote the Kootenai proposals and now leads the work. He will produce 45 beginning-level Kootenai lessons and conduct a fluency survey to assess the state of the language on the reservation.

Unique to Elmo, the language lessons have an opportunity to feed into the transcription work. Highly fluent speakers like the Andrew sisters can't work with learners who have no foundation, and without good lessons, the foundation is shoddy. The goal of Finley's work is to accurately teach learners enough of the

language that they can continue their learning by speaking with highly fluent elders.

But what does the language look like in between "beginner" and "elder?"

PARKED ON the monster's backbone, Daniel Stiffarm can point out some of the oxidized, rust-red dirt that was its blood. The whole hillside used to be red, but now it has faded, blown away, or grown over with scrub.

To most people, the Kootenai language is not unlike the monster. You can hear the language spoken — plant your feet firmly on its tangible existence — but the

lifeblood is long gone.

For Stiffarm, the language animates the hills, the rivers, the valleys.

His job is digitizing and cleaning up the audio recordings. He also represents perhaps the best-case scenario for speakers moving forward. He reveres and studies the language, and has benefitted from regularly hearing it as he goes through the recordings.

One of Stiffarm's hobbies is using the stories to locate places with traditional Kootenai names. On his maps, the names cluster around Elmo and the Big Draw, a mountain valley west of Elmo. Kootenais' historical territory was massive, but now there are just a few bands in British Columbia, one in Bonner's Ferry, Idaho and one on the Flathead. Names move outward from Elmo in a generally north-western direction but quickly become sparse, illustrating a major challenge that the Kootenais face: isolation.

The Flathead reservation is home to almost 30,000 people, but only a few hundred are Kootenai. Asked how many truly fluent speakers there are on the Flathead, Finley and the Andrews arrive at the same answer: "A handful."

The language is what linguists call a "language isolate": It's not known to be related to any other language. Additionally, Kootenai doesn't borrow many words. Speakers usually coined their own terms for things. Thus the vocabulary of the language shows when the language began to erode: There are traditional words for "train" and "automobile," but there is disagreement over "computer." Words for "email" and "text messaging" are noticeably absent.

Finley explained how traditional words reflect the Kootenai worldview in a way that modern, literal translations don't. The modern word used for coffee is "kapi," a simple phonetic match to the English word. It doesn't mean anything.

"Now, the original word for coffee," Finley said, "what my mom told me, was, 'a bitter drink.' And that would conjure something in the mind of a traditional Kootenai."

Similarly, Berney once saw someone online ask how to say, "I'm proud to be Kootenai." She asked one of the fluent speakers for an answer. They told her a Kootenai would just say, "I am Kootenai."

"It would never occur to someone who is Kootenai to brag about being Kootenai," Berney said. "The concept of being



ALICE HEWANKORN pauses over a word during a transcription session. Like most languages, Kootenai isn't directly translatable to English. Hewankorn must be creative in trying to capture the essence of the language in English.

proud to be Kootenai was sort of not translatable."

Finley's fluency survey asks Kootenais to self-assess their facility with the language. He aims to pass out 200 surveys to capture "those who identify and want to participate in Kootenai culture."

Some questions on the survey ask people to categorize their overall level of fluency, while others ask about comfort with words, phrases, and conversation. Finley anticipates differences between the older and younger generations. He suspects younger people will rate themselves high in overall fluency while revealing deficiencies in the other questions: "It's kind of shameful now, that some of the younger people think they know, when they know absolutely nothing, really. But that's something you're taught in Western life. You're supposed to brag."

What is interesting about what Finley says is its emphasis. It's not on the language dying, but shifting.

ALICE HEWANKORN works in the language trailer on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The one-room schoolhouse she attended in the early 1930s is just across the highway. The siding is aged grey; the wooden door is peeling. But from the

front steps, Hewankorn could see Monster Lake, foothills, and the entrance to the Big Draw. The view is spectacular; the vantage point, nearly lost to time.

Many Native Americans of Hewankorn's era say their school days ruined their language. She does not. She got to speak her language while still learning English, which might explain the remarkable ease with which she moves between the two. She possesses a singular ability to translate Kootenai into English that preserves the Kootenai worldview.

She and Berney station themselves at the conference table in the back of the room. Hewankorn wears dark black glasses to protect her eyes. On occasion, she removes them. A transformation occurs. Because they are there to protect her eyes, the glasses betray some amount of frailty. But her face without them is calm and attentive. This trade in frailty and wisdom befits the foremost speaker of an endangered language.

Hewankorn talks in a way that is plainspoken but playful. She demonstrates how to make one of Kootenai's more distinct sounds, a slurred L. The tip of the tongue is pressed to the roof of the mouth, directly behind the teeth, and air is forced around it. The language may be musical, but she says: "You've got to

learn to twist your tongue and gag and everything else."

Hewankorn is working on transcribing Alec Lefthand's story about unlikely lovers, Toad and Eagle.

She laughs through the transcription, she's as much an audience member as a translator. "That's a hell of a thing to say!" she exclaims when Toad is counseled to marry Eagle, a great hunter who never goes hungry.

Toad becomes infatuated with him. In one scene, Eagle returns home to Toad after a hunt. "Oh yeah..." says Hewankorn, listening to the recording. She translates: Toad sits down next to Eagle and puts her arm around him.

Lefthand's voice speaks more Kootenai. "Oh. My. God."

Toad has wrapped her arms around Eagle's waist.

"That's one way of getting a guy, I guess."

More Kootenai.

"Oh. My. God."

That night, they lie down together and Toad never lets go.

When Hewankorn is listening, she rests her chin on her hand. She wears a gold ring, not bright gold, but not

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PRESERVING KOOTENAI comes down to waveforms. Daniel Stiffarm works to make Kootenai recordings from the 1970s clean and clear. Then, native speaker and linguist Dorothy Berney can transcribe them.

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

tarnished either. Her late husband, Charlie Hewankorn, is spoken of often. To hear everyone tell it, Charlie was the expert speaker they looked up to, much the way they look up to Alice now.

Finley says in recent years it feels like almost every death in the community is a fluent speaker. There are the people on the tapes: Mary Andrew, Alec Lefthand, Adeline Mathias. There are the other people that have worked on the transcriptions in the past: Charlie Hewankorn, Lucy Caye. Sarah Bufton is still alive, but had to give up the transcription work.

They've all left their mark on the language, but their era is coming to an end.

As Alice and Berney near the end of their workday, Toad and Eagle's story takes a turn. Toad won't let go of Eagle, so Eagle can't hunt. They run out of food. Eagle has to hunt, but Toad insists on hanging on his back. Eagle flies under a branch and knocks off Toad.

"Broke up like glass," Alice says.

But then Toad's mother finds her broken body, puts the bones back together, brings her back to life. When Alice and Berney stop for the day, the Toads are plotting revenge.



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BERNEY ONCE asked Catherine her opinion of somebody's Kootenai rendering of, "The sun is up, the birds are singing."

"They aren't all singing!" Catherine told her. "Maybe white man bird does, but Kootenai's birds, they sound happy, they're chirping, they're making all kinds of noise!"

"Every single elder speaker I know, they just want their language to be recognizable to them," says Berney. "Sometimes they'll shake their head and say, 'Well, that's their language. I guess I'll have a whole other language.'"

The great fear for those who work in the trailer is that without fluent speakers, Kootenai will undergo a sea change, transforming from a native language that expresses native ideas to a native language that sees the world as the suyapi does. They all recognize high fluency is probably unattainable for future generations, which only strengthens their resolve to be precise and accurate.

While some might argue that the primacy of the Kootenai of elders past is an illusion, that languages are bound to change. Berney doesn't agree.

"I know everyone says that languages change and they adapt, but the kind of change we're talking about is not natural language change," she said. "That's over the course of a lot of time by actual first language learners, native speakers. Time and distance, languages eventually change. American English is quite different from British English. But it wasn't a bunch of people who don't know the language mispronouncing English."

Even so, language is tied to life experience. The recordings are incredibly useful but limited in number.

Stiffarm jokes about many of the storytellers on the recordings being women. "I was telling Dorothy a couple of weeks ago, I'm like, 'Hey, I'll get fluent, or as fluent as I can off the recordings and classes and whatnot, but if you take me back 200 years, I'll talk, and people would be looking at me, saying, Why are you talking like a woman?'"

The language trailer is rarely without laughter, but there is always an undercurrent of sadness. All the women mention getting lonely and calling Dorothy to talk Kootenai. Even Stiffarm wears a kind of wistfulness between his smiles.

It is hard not to hear every story as a metaphor for Kootenai itself; hard not to see each name jotted on one of Stiffarm's maps as a Shibboleth of some magical, once-proud people. Language is a tool humans use to cross the threshold between the world inside themselves and the worlds beyond.

"You'll be somebody then, if you learn your language," Catherine says to the younger generations.

If the goal were simply to try and ensure continued fluent use of Kootenai, the work might only be sad and quixotic. But Catherine's emphasis is on "your," not on "language." The novel aspect of the work she, her sister, Alice Hewankorn, Stiffarm, Finley and Berney are doing is that they are resolved to settle for nothing less than the language as they know it should be — which makes the work noble.

They will see Toad reconstituted, not a monster's carcass with a suyapi name. Perhaps no one will ever again speak Kootenai at the level of the transcribers, but the Kootenai they do learn, to whatever level they learn it, will be Kootenai, real Kootenai, the Kootenai that animates the rivers, the hills, the valleys. A people. ▽

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A SMALL cold case of produce and a section of bananas and peppers at the Lame Deer Trading Post are the only fresh produce sold on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation.

MISSING FROM THE MENU

NUTRITIOUS FOOD HARD TO FIND ON THE NORTHERN CHEYENNE RESERVATION

STORY BY AMY R. SISK
PHOTOS BY SARAH VAN NORTWICK

JANELLE TIMBER-JONES had a bowl of organic romaine on the counter and two bags of Lays sitting above the cabinet.

She chopped pineapple for a salad, which would accompany the tilapia fillets baking in her oven. She's made sure the night's dinner is low in calories and carbohydrates.

The meal in Timber-Jones' kitchen is a rarity on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation — a place where fatty, greasy foods often make up breakfast, lunch and dinner. In fact, sugary, carbonated beverages are so popular here that residents have nicknamed the reservation the “soda pop capital of Montana.”

“You can't sustain a very strict diet for a very long time living in the place we do,” Timber-Jones said.

Inside the reservation's lone grocery store, shoppers find pre-packaged iceberg lettuce in a produce section nestled between a wall of soda and a cooler of processed meat.



FLOYD BEARING, the financial manager of the Cheyenne Depot, restocks one of the cases of chips at the largest convenience store on the reservation. “Chips, chips, chips,” said resident Kay Medicine Bull when asked about the most popular food on the reservation.

So, for her dinner, Timber-Jones had to drive two hours west to Billings from her home near Ashland for the dark green leaf in her salad bowl. The only diabetic among the four people in her house, she watches what she eats and makes sure to exercise. But she occasionally allows herself to indulge, in this case, the Lays.

“Potato chips are my downfall,” she said, though she resisted the urge that night.

Timber-Jones lives in a food desert with limited choices for meals other than junk food. While fresh produce is more readily available today than a decade ago to people on the reservation, dense, high-calorie foods are still in high demand. This has helped create a community prone to health problems including obesity and heightened risks of developing diabetes.

CHIPS AND sugary drinks don’t last long on the shelves of the Cheyenne Depot 15 miles down the highway from Timber-Jones’ home. There’s already a line when the Lame Deer convenience store opens at 6 a.m. on the first day of any given month, the day food stamp and other public

assistance money is distributed to hundreds of residents.

On a Friday evening in April, the shelves of the walk-in storage cooler are filled with several dozen cases of soda, juice and energy drinks.

“By Monday, all of this will be gone, and most of the stuff on the floor will be gone too,” general manager Carrie Braine said.

It bothers her that people eat unhealthy food, and it upsets her more knowing her store supplies it. But the Depot offers what people want to eat. She gets after her friends, some diabetic, when she sees them standing in line to buy fried goods from her deli. Yet her scolding does little to change their purchases.

As Braine walked past the deli, she rubbed her finger across the glass window.

“It’s pretty nasty in here,” she said to the worker cleaning the case.

The grease came from the nearby vat of canola oil bubbling around a few dozen chicken tenders.

Braine made her way deeper into the kitchen, stopping at the vat of oil to explain that she receives shipments of frozen chicken

and other finger foods from a Sysco distributor in Billings.

“Those are my favorite,” she remarked, pointing to the thin strips of chicken bobbing in the grease.

Before she took over the store two years ago, she could count on two hands the number of times she entered the Depot each year. Now she eats her deli’s greasy food daily.

She has tried, with little success, to sell healthier items like the low-calorie Special K Cracker Chips sitting next to the deli’s soda machines.

“It came down here and it sat and it sat,” she said. “Nobody would touch it.”

Instead, people go for the Lays or Doritos, and they go fast.

When Braine first took over the store in 2012, she put liter bottles of soda on sale for \$1 and marked bags of chips down to \$1.19. The sale was so successful that she made enough money to bring in an entire truck full of chips and soda.

When the low-calorie cracker chips wouldn’t sell, she tried the same tactic. But even by reducing the price from \$1.49 to \$0.50, many of the bags sat in the same

basket months later. And though the \$0.50 string cheese packages are among the cheapest items in the store, few make their way to the checkout counter.

Braine hopes to add other healthy items like salads and deli sandwiches. But her first priority is to upgrade her checkout system and back office before she can focus on searching for a distributor.

Bringing in nutritious lunch foods offers an alternative to the deli’s grease, but it’s a gamble for business. Braine does not know whether those items would be any more popular than the cracker chips or string cheese.

IT’S A SIMILAR situation across the street at the Lame Deer Trading Post, the reservation’s only grocery store. A few years ago, the business put up tags to identify diabetic-friendly foods only to find that sugar-free cakes and syrup remained on the shelves.

When co-owner Donna Hurff brought in organic produce, she realized her clients did not know what organic meant.

“Those things just sat. They picked around it. They wouldn’t buy it,” she said. “I thought well maybe because they’re not educated, they don’t know what organic is. Who’s showing them that organic is better for you because it doesn’t have all the pesticides and poisons in it?”

She tried again several years later, thinking people might be more familiar with the term “organic.” Yet again, the organic fruits and vegetables, which have a shorter shelf life than conventional produce, started to rot.

The trading post recently finished a renovation to add an additional 5,000 square feet. The produce section is now larger, and when customers walk in, they are greeted by a small display of bananas, melons and vegetables.

“I see the green peppers right there, and I know I’d better grab one,” said Timber-Jones, the woman who tries to eat healthy in her Ashland home.

She works in Lame Deer for the Office of Public Instruction and drops by the trading post several times a week to pick up veggies or soup for lunch. Before she purchases an item, she makes sure to read the label. If there’s sugar, salt or fat in the first three ingredients, the item won’t make it into her cart.

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MARCIA ROPER spends every two weeks on the Northern Cheyenne reservation trying to get more people to select food as carefully as Timber-Jones. The California-based nutritionist has split her time between her home state and the reservation's Wellness Center for the past six years. She devotes two weeks a month to meeting with residents and helping them brainstorm ways to get their diabetes and weight under control. Native Americans are more than twice as likely to have diabetes than white people, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Inside her Lame Deer office, she works alongside diabetes specialists to promote her Healthy Plate Program. She frowns at using medication to treat diabetes. Insulin and pills can cause more harm than good, she said. Instead, she encourages patients to carefully monitor serving size and balance proteins, carbohydrates and non-starchy vegetables.

Tammy Roundstone, diabetes coordinator at the Wellness Center, said 11 percent of the reservation's 5,000 people have been diagnosed with diabetes. That's not as alarming as elsewhere in the country like southern Arizona where the diabetes rate for Pima Indians hovers around 50 percent, according to the National Institutes of Health. But the rate on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation does not take into account people who have not been diagnosed.

As Native Americans adopted western lifestyles, obesity and diabetes became more frequent, according to research by Dorothy Gohdes, MD, published in "Diabetes in America," a National Institutes of Health collection of medical reports on the disease. People on reservations began to consume more fat when they stopped gathering food through hunting and farming, and motorized vehicles and sedentary jobs have not helped matters.

Through screenings and education programs, Roundstone and the other seven people who work at the Northern Cheyenne Wellness Center try to identify individuals with diabetes or prediabetes, which occurs when a person's glucose level rises but not high enough to indicate diabetes.

Since the center opened in the early 2000s, she has seen the number of people on the reservation who maintain control over the disease double to 45 percent.

Roper, the nutritionist, spent the month of April promoting her Healthy Plate Program in the Lame Deer Trading Post. She



placed tags next to items like nutrient-rich vegetables and other healthy foods. The Wellness Center staffers are hopeful that by offering tours of the grocery store, people will make healthier purchases.

Some residents on the reservation prefer to shop in Billings where food is cheaper than rural grocery stores. Roundstone believes the tags and tours will pay off for them there as well.

"We can still show them what they can mix and match to make a healthy meal," she said. "They can take what they learn to Walmart or wherever they shop."

It is possible for people to eat healthy regardless of where they obtain food, Roper said. Officials on the reservation estimate that three-quarters of people living there receive food assistance, either through food stamps or commodities.

The commodity program provides food to low-income Native Americans free of charge through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Lame Deer, 526 people stopped at the commodity distribution center warehouse in March to pick up their allotted canned and boxed goods, said Linda Freeman, director of the Food Distribution Program on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. They can

select items like frozen beef and chicken from the freezer, or bulk beans, and cans of beef stew or peaches stacked in cardboard boxes on top of pallets.

She said the USDA has gradually improved the nutritional value of its commodity food, much to the dismay of some residents.

People living off commodities can still maintain a healthy diet if they work at it, Roper said. The greatest impediment she sees to accessing healthy food on the reservation is a lack of jobs. Well over half the residents are unemployed. Having a regular paycheck would allow people to purchase food and go a long way toward increasing individuals' happiness and self-worth, she said.

Stress, as well as caffeine, present major barriers to losing weight, and they are both prevalent on the reservation, Roper said. In particular, deaths of family and friends can wreak havoc on a person's physical health, especially if that person has type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

THAT'S WHAT Timber-Jones believes led to her diagnosis 20 years ago. She had started to lose energy and didn't know why, so she visited the reservation's Indian Health Services clinic. The doctor informed

her that her blood sugar had spiked to a number eight times the recommended level, and she was immediately hospitalized. Several months later, she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Her pancreas, which produces insulin necessary to allow sugar to enter cells, had stopped functioning.

Several of her family members also had diabetes, but she's certain genetics are not the only factor contributing to her diagnosis. Within a short period of time, she had gotten divorced, lost a sibling and grandmother, and her stepmother suffered a massive stroke. The stress was eating away.

"Holistically, you have emotions, your spiritual peace, your physical peace — and all of those things play a part in your body," she said. "It was a perfect marriage to have that happen to me."

She ran three miles a day prior to her diagnosis and kept running afterward, competing in several marathons. The medals she keeps in her bedroom showcase the high points of her fight to stay healthy, but she hasn't always felt like gold.

Her house burned to the ground in the summer 2012 Ash Creek fire, and several people close to her died around the same time. In the year that followed, she lost sight of maintaining a healthy diet and workout

regimen, gaining 25 pounds.

“When you are depressed, you don’t really want to get up and chop veggies,” she said.

She found her stride again in February, as well as a new natural foods store in Billings with organic apples, pears and pistachios that sat on her kitchen table. Nearly every day, she pulls on her tennis shoes and puts in her earbuds before setting out for a jog across the grassy flatlands.

With few options for entertainment, people on the reservation watch a lot of TV, she said. Time and time again, they get bombarded with ads for highly processed food.

“People are willing to run out and try it,” she said. “We know sugar is addicting. Sugar is in almost everything. So if they try something new and it has sugar in it and they are already addicted, guess what?”

THAT OFTEN happens when people drink soda, something Lame Deer resident Barbara Braided Hair was reminded of this spring when a neighborhood boy visited her home. When she asked the boy if he would like some water, he eagerly said yes. All his mother had been giving him was Dr. Pepper.

This horrified Braided Hair, who grew up with her grandmother’s cooking along the Tongue River in Birney. Her grandmother prepared dishes from processed commodity cheese and canned fruits and meat, but Braided Hair likes to remember the items she helped gather: fresh caviar and trout from the river.

“We can only eat so much because we need to let them grow,” her grandmother would tell her as she prepared the fish. “That way they will be plentiful next season.”

Before “organic” became a buzzword, Braided Hair helped her grandmother harvest berries and vegetables, both pesticide free, from the garden next to the house. Food, her grandmother said, holds spiritual meaning for the Northern Cheyenne.

“When we prepared food, my grandmother would say, ‘You can’t have bad feelings. If you had a bad day, things didn’t go well, let that go and pray about it. As you prepare food, the feeling goes into the food,’” she said.

Braided Hair’s grandmother encouraged her to teach her children to pray, so she did.

On a recent afternoon, Braided Hair sat in the break room of the First Interstate Bank, located across the street from the Lame Deer Trading Post. She had just come from the grocery store and set up a lunch of strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, carrots, broccoli and iceberg lettuce salad.

The bank manager bowed her head and asked — in the native Tsehesenestsetotse tongue — for the spirits to come, and she thanked them for the blessings of food and nourishment.

There was no soda at the table. She has sworn it off.

Drinking soda in a social setting is akin to ordering beer at a bar, she said. It’s so embedded in the Northern Cheyenne culture that guests show up with a case of Pepsi or Mountain Dew at every baby shower and birthday party.

Her daughter, Jessica, recalled her high school days a decade ago when students thought nothing of downing “Big Slam” liter-sized bottles of soda. When she first met her boyfriend and his family, she noticed they also drank far too much of the sugary concoction.

“I said, ‘We need water,’ so now we’re both trying to change that,” she said. “If we didn’t do that, they would just drink pop every single day.”

BARBARA BRAIDED HAIR has talked to Timber-Jones about starting a co-op to provide items like fresh veggies, soups, kombucha — a fermented black tea drink — and other exotic foods for people to try. But that’s a pipe dream for now.

“I would love to see that, and I have been praying for it,” she said. “If you pray for something good for the people, you have to be patient because it might not come tomorrow or next year or in 10 years, but it will be here.”

Thanks to a new greenhouse, the Boys & Girls Club in Lame Deer is trying to grow its own food to feed the community. A hundred children hang out there every day after school, doing crafts, playing games and eating snacks like carrots with ranch dip and milk. Because so many of the children come from low-income families, the club gets reimbursed for the money it spends on snacks through the USDA, provided those snacks are healthy.

In April, the kids took their milk cartons into the crafts room, where they reused them as temporary pots to plant vegetables. The plants will be moved to the greenhouse to continue growing throughout the summer.

“We would like to have enough produce to provide a meal,” said Lanita Haugen, unit director for the Boys & Girls Clubs in Lame Deer and Ashland. “We would like the kids to invite their families and have a dinner, and introduce them to what the Boys & Girls Club has done.”



1) PEOPLE WHO qualify for the commodity food program choose food for their families at the distribution center. Unfortunately, the food is sometimes not enough to last through the month.

2) BARBARA BRAIDED HAIR, 50, prepares a healthy lunch of food she purchased at the Lame Deer Trading Post, the only grocery store on the reservation. Braided Hair treated her family to lunch while at her work at the First Interstate Bank in Lame Deer.

3) “I HATE carrots,” says 6-year-old Max Littlebird as he reaches for a healthy snack at the Boys & Girls Club of the Northern Cheyenne Nation. The club’s food is funded by a program that requires it to serve healthy foods to kids, such as carrots with ranch dressing.

Last year, the club ran a diabetes education program to encourage children to exercise and eat healthy, and the lessons stuck. The kids were so excited about adopting new eating habits that some started asking their parents to buy better food.

“Having parents share that with us shows

that they were paying attention,” Haugen said.

Whether kids teach their parents or adults pass the message on to their children, no one expects a reservation-wide shift to a healthy diet overnight. ▽



HORSES ROAM the lawn of Crow police headquarters in Crow Agency. Tribal patrol vehicles sit behind them, many not in use because there aren't enough officers to operate them.

LACKING LAW ENFORCEMENT

AS CRIME ON THE CROW RESERVATION INCREASES, SO
MUST THE POLICE FORCE THAT PROTECTS

STORY BY ZENO WICKS IV
PHOTOS BY LOUISE JOHNS



BERNADETTE AND Fred Charette sit with their dog, Molly, in Bernadette's home in Crow Agency. As a young girl, Bernadette lived in the same house before moving away to be a school teacher. She returned six years ago when her grandmother left her the house. Bernadette says that although much has changed in Crow Agency since she grew up there, she still feels safe living there.

AT 8:40 P.M., a Ford Crown Victoria patrol car turned on its lights and sped down the frontage road to Hardin, leaving the dispatcher alone at Crow police headquarters. Within the following half hour she would answer a call for police in Crow Agency, but no officer was available to respond. Nearly 50 minutes would pass before the Crown Victoria would return to the small brick building, located off Interstate 90 near the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

The vehicle would remain parked, its engine running and tail lights glowing red in the waning daylight of March 29. Five minutes later, tribal police officer Jeff Grisham rushed back into the running car and drove north out of the lot to respond to a call near Little Bighorn College.

The 2-mile road bends east past the grandstand, a 200-foot-tall structure for rodeos and other events, and wraps back over Custer Creek into town. Kitty-corner to campus, on the southeast side, is a cul de sac with trailers and homes of varying conditions.

Thirty minutes earlier Bernadette Charette, who lives at the end of the cul de sac near Custer Creek, put on her blue robe and slippers to let out LaFee and Molly — a schnauzer and a toy fox terrier. Outside the two dogs bolted under the camper parked on the front lawn of the small blue home.

Charette, 78, focused through her large, round spectacles on the blue house across the way.

A moldy and tattered mattress sat just below the sill.

As her eyes adjusted, Charette noticed the

vague outline of a girl in the corner of the house near the mattress. The girl stood still, shivering. They made eye contact. Charette, a small woman with white hair and hunched back immediately turned towards the camper.

"Molly! LaFee!" she whispered urgently, opening the front door. "Get inside!"

She locked the door behind her and told her husband, Fred, what she saw. They waited up the next half hour, but there was no movement outside.

There was no response to the call for police.

After deciding it was safe to sleep they headed to bed. It was then, Charette noticed the search lights of a tribal officer's car. The light passed over their home and then the home across the way, illuminating the mattress and the corner. The girl was gone.

Shortly after, another car arrived. Dorothea Adams, Charette's neighbor, had called the police because a granddaughter had shown up to her house drunk. It's illegal to drink on the Crow reservation. When Grisham and tribal officer Tim Smells knocked on the door of Adams' new green double-wide trailer home, she answered, but her granddaughter had run long ago.

"She knows she isn't supposed to be there drunk," Grisham later says. "Dorothea has to call them in sometimes."

On a busy weekend night, though, officers aren't able to respond in time to such calls. Unlike Adams, but like most on the Crow Reservation, Charette reacted differently.

"I didn't call the police," Charette later said. "I don't call the police."

CHARETTE'S FEELINGS are shared by a majority on Crow. And not without reason.

The reservation has a complicated public safety system that consists of both a tribal police force and a larger federal law enforcement agency, run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Justice Services. The BIA, which has full jurisdiction over the Crow reservation, is a small division of the federal government. This means personnel constantly changes as officers seek out higher BIA or federal positions for higher pay, stature and improved benefits.

In 20 years, the Crow has been unable to create a version of its own steady law enforcement team to serve and protect the reservation with any kind of consistency.

The result is an increasing polarization between the BIA police and the tribe whose laws they are contracted to enforce. There has also been a steady increase in crime for more than three decades.

As a smaller part of the larger BIA system, the Crow have seen several successful police chiefs come and go. Effective leaders are eventually channeled into higher positions, making the Crow reservation a mere stop toward greater opportunity.

Despite his efforts to improve enforcement on the reservation, Tony Larvie is a recent example in history of this upward momentum.

Larvie was appointed chief of police December 2011. At the time, he was a drug investigator for the BIA Offices of Justice Services in Billings. He was hired in the wake of Crow's most violent year in recent history. According to the BIA Justice Department, in 2011, stabbings and shootings claimed the lives of five — four in Lodge Grass and one in Pryor — along with 45 other serious incidents including aggravated assault, arson and sexual offenses.

Larvie reports the Crow police department had a total of nine officers, tribal and BIA, when he arrived. But with Larvie came a rush of support from both the Crow tribe and the BIA for more police officers.

Tribal officers, who are supported through the Crow tribe and trained in state academies, were given more funding through grants supplied by the Crow tribe. The Washington D.C.-based BIA offices also allocated money for more officers, who are trained at a federal base in New Mexico. In total, Larvie's law enforcement staff more than doubled.

During the summer of 2012, Crow administrative officials reported 10 BIA patrol officers, six tribal police officers, two supervisory advisors, and three investigators at the station. Larvie believes the increase helped lead to more arrests for disorderly conduct, public nuisance

and drinking-related offenses in 2012.

These arrests, he said, have a correlation to the nearly 20 percent decrease in more serious crimes recorded in 2012 — the BIA Justice Department recorded 42 serious incidents the entire year.

But the flaw remains.

Larvie is no longer police chief. And many of the positions created during his tenure are now vacant.

THE MAIN entrance of headquarters was blocked with unused cabinets, boxes and exercise equipment. The east entrance is used by both police and the general public.

Upon returning from the failed search of Dorothea Adams' granddaughter, Grisham parked his patrol vehicle near the others. A light from the west window illuminated a Ford truck, investigation van, and eight Ford Explorers parked in two perpendicular lines on the grass. They haven't been moved in years because they don't have the tribal officers to drive them.

Four days later in the Crow police meeting room, Grisham recalled the evening. Grisham is a wide man for 5 feet 9 inches. His black BIA garb was uncomfortably tight over the bullet proof vest he wore.

Grisham said such busy weekend nights, which require long hours, are why he wants to switch to BIA. And the reason so many tribal cars sit vacant.

"The bad thing about being a tribal officer is that we don't get benefits, health insurance, retirement. And there is always the job security. There's always things going on with the tribe and who knows where cuts are going to be made," Grisham said with a chew tucked in his right lip. "I think that with a majority of the tribal guys that we have, everyone has mentioned that they want to go Bureau."

Down the hall Police Chief Jose Figueroa Jr. sat at his wood desk. Various papers were stacked on the dressers surrounding the room. A door leading to a back patio was blocked by a cabinet. In front of him, two Dell monitors displayed separate email drafts.

Figueroa became police chief in August 2013. He is the second since Larvie was promoted to district director of drug enforcement in Billings in February 2013. He is aware of the allure that the BIA has for many of his officers.

"The perception is that everyone that goes to Crow, typically, goes on to bigger and better things," Figueroa said, leaning back in his leather chair. "And that's what most of the staff has asked me, 'How long are you going to be here?'"

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Both of Figueroa's predecessors were promoted to Billings. The current BIA Justice Department Director in Washington, D.C., Darren Cruzan, spent just under a year at Crow in 2004 before continuing up the promotion chain. Indeed, it seems the natural trajectory for those police chiefs that pass through Crow is up. This has kept Crow police numbers down.

"First and foremost, as you can see on the board," Figueroa said, pointing to a whiteboard listing Crow officers. "We need to get more guys here."

Figueroa is tall, more than six feet. His hair is cut high and tight, exposing a broad forehead and thin eyebrows. He is half Mexican, but grew up Assiniboine and Sioux on the Fort Peck Reservation. He has a wide smile betraying the red eyes and heavy sockets of a thoughtful man low on sleep.

Written in red dry-erase marker was Figueroa's name along with the names of six BIA officers, a lieutenant and two tribal officers. Additionally, two names filled the slots next to Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act officer and Highway Patrol officer. Four BIA officers positions, along with one tribal position, were blank.

Figueroa said the BIA provides funding for 15 officers, including a police chief and two lieutenants, and the tribe pays for three tribal officers and handles grants for three specialty officers. He has more budget for more officers than Larvie did just two years before. But the officers aren't there to fill the positions.

Just as police chiefs are pumped through Crow, so are BIA officers. Figueroa said it's standard for the BIA to re-assign officers to different reservations as needed.

"When I first got here in August, I established a Lodge Grass officer and a Pryor officer because that's where our needs are," Figueroa said. "And we had five guys then, but we have lost five guys since then."

The Pryor officer is no longer, and Figueroa keeps up with the duties of the four empty BIA officer positions.

OF THE seven reservations in Montana, three utilize their own tribal law enforcement, two utilize state law enforcement and laws, while two contract through the BIA. Crow falls in the latter while still employing a few tribal officers. But many on Crow believe the tribe should employ its own police force.

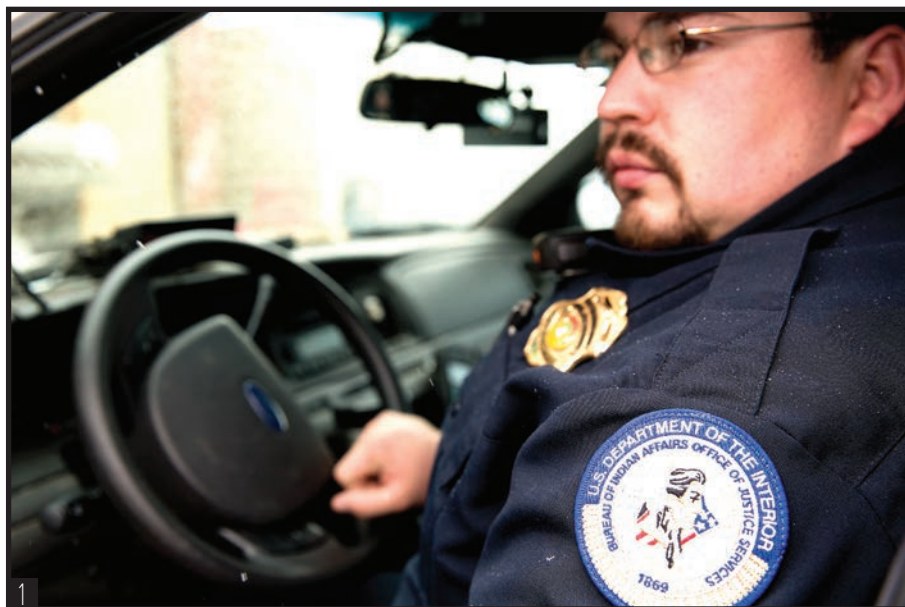
"The biggest problem we have here is that the guys that we have here on the ground want to do the work, but they're being dictated by people out of the area office, which is in Billings. They don't understand what is going on here," said Tribal Chairman Darren Old Coyote in his office in the Crow Tribal Administration Building. "And that is the biggest problem because they have to answer to an outside entity, where we are sitting here and we know the problems, and where to do this and that."

Old Coyote says to get rid of the problem, the tribe would have to invoke Public Law 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which allows U.S. tribes to contract from the federal government a number of public service programs such as health care, law enforcement and education.

By "638-ing" the entire program, the Crow would receive the federal dollars that are currently used to pay for the federal BIA police force and use that to run a tribal law enforcement program.

"That's an option that we are looking at," Old Coyote said, "but at the same time we are mindful of the liabilities that we would have to assume."

Even after 638, federal grants would not be near enough to pay for a law enforcement agency large enough to appropriately cover the Crow reservation. At 2.3 million acres, Crow is the largest reservation in Montana. To sufficiently cover the land, Crow needs a police



1) JEFF GRISHAM is a tribal police officer stationed in Lodge Grass on the Crow Indian Reservation. Although the tribe funds tribal police officers, they still operate under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Grisham says eventually he will become a BIA officer for the higher pay and benefits.

2) THOMAS LARSON Medicinehorse and his wife, Patti Medicinehorse, sit in their house in Crow Agency. Larson was the first Native American to become sheriff of Hardin County. He was sheriff for 16 years before being nominated for Sheriff of the Year in 2002.

3) SIDNEY "CHIPPER" Fitzpatrick Jr. owns Apsaalooke Contracting. He employs 34 people, half of which are former convicts. In summer 2013, Fitzpatrick signed a \$6.2 million contract with Crow Agency to replace a 75-year-old water and sewer system. He is Big Horn County commissioner and a former Bureau of Indian Affairs police officer.

force larger than the average reservation, which would mean the need for more money.

Director of Crow Land Security Henry "Hank" Rides Horse, said there would need to be 35 police on staff to appropriately cover the reservation. A number, Rides Horse believes would cost roughly \$2.5 million dollars annually.

"Our next step is to be utilizing our resources. And in doing so, we won't be asking

from the U.S. government," Rides Horse said. He added that the tribe has several natural resources, including coal, water and tourism. "We have to start utilizing them in order to be self sufficient, not only law enforcement, but the whole government."

THE CROW tribe has tried to operate its own law enforcement before. Since the 1905 territorial establishment, Crow had been in



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charge of creating and enforcing their own laws within the reservation.

In 1980 the Crow police began to supplement tribal officers with BIA investigators. But it wasn't until 1990 that the tribe's police force began contracting a majority of their law enforcement through the BIA.

In the early '70s, Thomas Larson Medicinehorse, 74, was a tribal officer based out of Crow Agency. He says that during that time, there were also substations in Lodge Grass and Pryor.

When Medicinehorse was 23, he decided to attend the BIA police academy, and enrolled in the first graduating class. In 1990 he returned to the reservation and ran for sheriff of Big Horn County to battle the racial profiling Crow tribal members reported experiencing by sheriff's deputies. He became the first Crow sheriff of the county, a position he held for 16 years.

But as civil rights and law enforcement took a large step forward at the county, tribal law enforcement faced crisis on the reservation. Financial cuts hit Crow police the hardest.

"The tribal officers were qualified to do their work," Medicinehorse says. "It was the leadership. Some people were advanced beyond their capabilities, and then the tribe used up the money. So the tribal police were left without funds. They didn't have no money to go out and patrol. And they only had about five or six officers at that time, because they couldn't hire anymore."

Sidney "Chipper" Fitzpatrick Jr., who was the officer stationed in Pryor, was one of those to leave. He had been the D.A.R.E. officer for Pryor High School, but the tribe offered few benefits to law enforcement officers, benefits offered with a job at the BIA. He was the last officer stationed in Pryor for more than two decades.

"I think that when I left, it changed then," Chipper said. "And there is more people. When I was a cop, we were at about 7,000, now we are up to 13,000."

But until the Crow can revert to the old system, Chipper, now Bighorn County Commissioner, believes the communication between law enforcement and Crow citizens needs to improve.

"It's not just law enforcement, it's everybody. It's the community that networks together to tackle this issue — violence, drugs and alcohol," Chipper said. "Just the law enforcement ain't gonna' change it, we need to change as a reservation."

TO FACILITATE networking between community and law enforcement, the Crow have assigned an innovative position, director of



public safety, to an innovative individual.

William Falls Down sat at the wooden desk he found abandoned in the east wing of the Crow Tribal Administration building. He wore a red, button-down shirt, black jeans and black cowboy boots. Falls Down's wide smile showed displaced teeth.

He was hired when Old Coyote was elected and adapted a room tucked in the middle of the administration building. He is a Republican surrounded by a predominantly liberal staff. It is his experience that got him to the position.

Falls Down has been in law enforcement for more than 28 years. As a BIA officer, he has served in 87 different reservations in a variety of positions.

Born Crow, Falls Down returned to his reservation to serve with Crow Fish and Game before switching to director of public safety. Through his experience, Falls Down also believes the tribe should take over the public safety program. But he doesn't believe it will happen anytime soon, even under the administration that hired him. Thus he looks at what he can do with the BIA officials he is given.

"We give them (the BIA) the authority to supervise our tribal officers," Falls Down said. "The chief of police, Jose Figueroa, works with me on a daily basis on the daily functions of the tribal police."



Since starting his position, Falls Down said Figueroa is the first BIA Police Chief that has been eager to work with the tribal officers the Crow supply. Their working relationship goes back to Figueroa's childhood when Falls Down used to babysit him on the Fort Peck Reservation.

Figueroa said their closeness has opened up a dialogue that he is surprised didn't happen before.

"We both said that we have to work together. We cannot not work together. It doesn't work that way," Figueroa said. "I don't know why they had these issues before, but we have to work together. The government and tribal still have to intertwine because we are both trying to accomplish the same mission, which is services to the community and protection." ▽



JOHN GYSLER, a hardware and furniture store owner in Wolf Point, dips into a bowl of peanuts and chats with regulars at Missouri Breaks Brewing while brewery co-owner Mark Zilkoski checks his iPad. Every Sunday afternoon after mass, Zilkoski, also known as "Doc'Z," and his band play for a few hours in the lounge before moving to the taproom to finish off the evening.

BREWING A NEW CULTURE

PUB CHALLENGES THE PERCEPTION OF DRINKING
ON THE FORT PECK RESERVATION

STORY BY JACKSON BOLSTAD
PHOTOS BY AUSTIN J. SMITH



MISSOURI BREAKS Brewing co-owner Mark Sansaver jokes with a niece during a Friday afternoon visit to the Wolf Point pub. Sansaver works at the Fort Peck Community College business office handling grant funding and, because of limited mobility, rarely makes it to the pub.

RESIDENTS OF Wolf Point can recall when the building sat vacant before it underwent multiple transformations. First it was a pool hall. Then a meat locker. Later, a law firm. But now the building, made of dark brick, has taps jutting from polished chrome coolers, dripping gold and glistening liquid behind the tasting room's 40-foot wooden bar.

Surrounding the room, high on a set of shelves, stand more than 196 empty growlers collected from breweries across the United States.

On this evening, the microbrewery featured India Pale Ale, wheat, stout, Belgian-style ale, pale ale and Scottish ale. Also, the bowls of popcorn were free with a beer purchase.

Co-owners Mark Sansaver, an Assiniboine tribal member, and Mark Zilkoski, a local doctor, opened Missouri Breaks Brewing in 2009 on the Fort Peck reservation, home of the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes and one of the larger, more remote reservations in the state. The establishment is one of only two breweries located on a Montana reservation.

In the five years it has served craft beer on the reservation, Missouri Breaks has seen little to no backlash from the surrounding community. This is rare, considering the deep and complex history that Native American tribes have with alcohol, not only in consumption, but also perception. Instead, the locally-owned microbrewery

has made itself into a welcoming, if not relaxing, hotspot, a stark contrast to the generations-old stereotype of addiction and drunkenness.

"People wouldn't conceive of doing this, because of the stereotypes, the issues, the economics," Sansaver said.

Fort Peck has a high unemployment rate, a fractured demography and a history of alcohol-related issues — all attributes that can lead to excessive alcohol consumption, said Adriann Ricker, former quality practice manager at the Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center.

"Opening the brewery wasn't something that we took lightly," Zilkoski said. "I mean we are adding another bar to Wolf Point, Montana. We're adding another bar to a reservation."

Wolf Point's Northeastern Montana Health Services sees around 160 people during the weekends, said Zilkoski, the community's only doctor. He said alcohol contributes to some visits, though it is not the main reason people are admitted to the hospital.

However, most alcohol-related incidents the hospital does see are people who are "very, very drunk." In most cases, the person ends up getting so intoxicated that they end up injuring themselves or others in some type of reckless activity, he said.

As a result, Sansaver said the brewery is serious about its community responsibility. When you serve alcohol, you are responsible



ALONNA SANSAVER fills a growler of Rattlesnake IPA for a Wolf Point local during a Friday shift at Missouri Breaks Brewing. "I would say that the pub is a great outlet for the people who wanted a place to go that was a healthy environment," Sansaver said.

for the well-being of your clientele, especially fellow tribal members, he said. Opening up a brewery on a reservation promotes drinking high alcohol content beer for not only Native Americans, but also the rest of the community. He had to consider those implications.

"As a tribal member, I definitely thought about social responsibility and what does this mean to the community," Sansaver said. "There is a huge problem with alcohol on the reservation, fatal deaths, youth drinking and so forth."

Since 2011, more than 60 percent of the Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center's clients have been diagnosed with acute and severe alcohol problems. The center has seen approximately 850 patients during that time.

Alcohol has become a generational problem because of the Fort Peck reservation's long history with poverty, Ricker said. The reservation is experiencing its fourth generation that has been exposed to alcohol.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

“In our society, (kids) learn to drink from what they see with their families, and a lot of that is to excess and partying throughout the nights,” Ricker said.

People tend to place a stigma on Native Americans when it comes to drinking. Ricker said the perception is that people either don't do it at all or are drunks — there is no middle ground. Anywhere else in the world, someone can have a glass of wine with dinner and it's no big deal, but people think Native Americans are just drinking to get drunk, she said.

Combating alcohol issues on the reservation will require a change in social and cultural norms, Ricker said. Alcohol problems later in life stem a lot from what people learn when they are growing up. If the bars and parties are the only option, then that becomes the way people learn to drink, she said.

DURING A SPRING evening, Mark Sansaver leaned forward in his chair and clasped a red straw between his lips, taking a long sip of rich, dark beer. Sansaver paused between gulps to catch his breath.

“So Mark, I thought you said you weren't going to have a beer,” said Mark Zilkoski, seated to Sansaver's right.

“Exactly, I said ‘I wasn't going to have a beer,’” Sansaver said. “I've had two.”

Sansaver likes to come into Missouri Breaks and enjoy a few beers with friends and family while discussing the latest news in Wolf Point. The brewery is tailored to create an environment that welcomes people to do the same while drinking craft beer, a rarity in rural northeastern Montana, he said.

Montana has had a surge in breweries opening across the state in the past few years. The state ranked third in the number of breweries per capita in 2012, with 36, according to the American Homebrewers Association.

The majority of Montana breweries are in the western half, primarily in larger cities. But breweries are increasingly targeting rural areas, said Tony Herbert, Montana Brewers Association executive director.

A brewery can provide jobs, new economic stimuli via tourism and change the culture of the area. Even underprivileged areas can benefit from a brewery, he said.

“The populations may not be big, but a brewery is a new business down the street, and most people like to support these breweries,” Herbert said.

Roxanne Gourneau, a tribal council-woman, said 10 years ago the community and tribes would have never allowed Missouri Breaks Brewing to open because of the overabundance of bars on the reservation.

“There used to be more bars and beauty salons than places to buy groceries in this town,” Gourneau said.

PEOPLE HAVE come to accept bars and liquor stores, so a brewery isn't much different from what they already had, Sansaver said.

“Certainly people have to make decisions when they partake in alcohol consumption, including the ramifications of drinking and driving,” Sansaver said. “We're not making excuses that we opened an establishment on the reservation, in light of the problems that brings with it. But we're adults, and adults can make those decisions and handle themselves properly and responsibly.”

Historically, federal law prohibited the sale or exchange of alcohol in Indian Country. But Congress in 1948 exempted from that law non-tribally owned lands in “non-Indian communities” on reservations, like Wolf Point and Poplar. The courts have considered a number of factors when determining whether a community is non-Indian, including racial composition of the population and the use of services in the area by tribal members.

In 1953, federal legislation gave tribes the ability to regulate liquor sales on reservations. Maylenn Smith, associate professor of law at the University of Montana, said these regulations are convoluted in that they may give tribes only certain authority over the sale of alcohol on reservations.

Although tribes can completely ban alcohol on reservations, including non-Indian communities, the courts have not decided whether tribes that allow alcohol can regulate its sale in non-Indian communities, Smith said.

Many reservations across the nation are strictly dry reservations, but some are starting to relax those laws to promote new business. Many tribal communities are fighting against these changes.

On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, the Oglala Sioux Tribe legalized alcohol sales in a 2013 ballot referendum. The issue was met with mass protests, including an incident in which the tribe's president was arrested for attempting to block a truck from delivering beer to a bordertown package liquor store. Although voters approved the referendum, the tribal council has yet to



ABOVE: RYAN WHITE Horse takes a nap during his friend Melvin Martell's 2 p.m. pool game at Arlo's Bar in Wolf Point.

BELOW: BREWMEISTER KATIE Zilkoski's son Reed, 2, falls asleep in the brewery's lounge area while his mother cooks spaghetti and meat sauce in an electric pot.

Customers of both venues may carve out an area for an afternoon nap, but where nodding out at Arlo's gets you ejected, the brewery simply closes its lounge doors and the rest of the pub knows to enter quietly.

ratify the policy, which is currently held in legal red tape.

But alcohol sales have been decreasing in border towns around Pine Ridge in recent years. The city of Whiteclay, Nebraska has seen a drop in beer sales at non-bar establishments — from 465,000 gallons of beer in 2010, to 336,000 in 2013 — according to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission.

The Fort Peck tribes have never enacted an ordinance to permit, ban or regulate the sale of liquor on the reservation. But many

tribal members have been pushing to make the reservation totally dry, Gourneau said.

But Gourneau said that would probably cause more problems for the reservation, like drunk driving and illegal alcohol sales.

Instead, the community and tribes have worked hard to promote awareness about the effects of alcohol, and to prevent alcohol-related accidents through increased police intervention, Gourneau said.

Throughout the last decade, Fort Peck has seen fluctuating trends in its alcohol sales and related incidents.



A CLERK at T.J.'s Quik Stop stocks the beer cooler the evening of March 31, the night before payday in Poplar. According to T.J.'s, the cooler is often emptied within 24 hours, and patrons must wait for the delivery truck that arrives Wednesday mornings.

Since 2003, the number of DUIs processed by the Fort Peck Tribal Judicial Services steadily increased by 41 percent to 470 in 2013. In 2003, prosecutors filed 333 cases.

Meanwhile, reservation stores have seen a decrease in alcohol sales. In 2010, Nemont Beverage Corporation, which distributes beer to 25 establishments on the reservation, sold the equivalent of about 9,172 cans of beer throughout Fort Peck. In 2013, the company sold just over 7,713 cans of beer.

But Ricker, an employee of the Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center, said part of the reason for the drop in beer sales is a change in substance use on Fort Peck. Alcohol isn't the main substance of choice for the current 20-30 year olds, she said.

"The alcohol problem has always been an issue that we deal with, but more and

more what we're seeing is the co-occurring, where you have the alcohol and the prescription drugs and the meth, but alcohol is still the common denominator," Ricker said.

Alcohol consumption is ingrained in the reservation's culture, she said. It will take generations to change this. It can be done, but it's going to have to happen not only at the bars, but also with the tribes and in family circles.

Ricker said Missouri Breaks Brewing could help change the face of drinking on the reservation by changing the social stigma of what it means to drink and how people learn to drink. But the brewery is still a relatively new establishment, and it will take generations to determine if the pub will impact how tribal members drink, she said.

LEANING AGAINST the red paneled exterior of Arlo's Bar, Peggy Martell, 39, and her friends share a cigarette. It's 1 p.m. on a Saturday, and the group is trying to get together enough money to buy a fifth of vodka at the liquor store next door.

"Hey, we've got like \$3, do you have a couple, its only like \$12," one of the men says to Peggy.

Digging in her pocket, she pulls out a crumpled \$10 bill and shoves it into the man's hand.

"Make sure I get a couple shots of that," she says as the man turns to the liquor store.

Peggy and her friends have been to Missouri Breaks Brewing a couple of times, but it's not really their type of hang out. They've been regulars at Arlo's and the Water Hole bar for years.

"The beer is really good (at the brewery), they've got some really funny names for the beer," Martell said. "But you can only get four drinks and stay for a few hours, because they don't want it to turn into the Water Hole."

Martell said limiting hours and high-priced drinks are a big reason she and her friends don't go to the brewery. She said the brewery feels like more of an establishment for the elite people in the community.

"It's so expensive and you just feel like you can't go in because of that," Martell said. "Some people walk in, and you just feel a bit judged."

As is the trend with microbreweries, Missouri Breaks Brewing tends to attract a certain type of crowd, said Don Tomsic, owner of Stockmans 220 Club, just down the street from the brewery.

Arlo's and the Water Hole tend to attract the lower income crowd, while Stockmans and Dad's Bar get an even mix. The Elks Club gets more of the middle-income crowd, and the brewery attracts the middle-to upper-income crowd, Tomsic said.

The brewery has been a great addition to the town, despite adding another drinking establishment, Tomsic said. The community, especially other bars and businesses, really had no animosity toward it opening because Sansaver and Zilkoski were the ones in charge. The two have been residents for decades, and are as much a part of the community as anyone else. They understood the ramifications of what they were doing, he said.

"If anyone else would have done it, there would have been backlash for sure," Tomsic

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said. “But with it being them, it was welcomed. I like it because it has limited hours and drink limits, because it is stronger brews.”

State law limits every brewery patron to four beers a night, and restricts hours of operation if the brewery is only a tasting room. Missouri Breaks is open from 4-8 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturday.

Those limitations make it easier for Tomsic’s bartenders to responsibly serve their customers, because it’s easier to make the judgement to cut someone off based on numeric limits rather than observed limits. It’s harder to know someone’s intoxication level when they come from Arlo’s or the Water Hole; it’s those situations that can lead to fights, injuries and accidents, Tomsic said.

The state’s limitations on breweries helped Sansaver and Zilkoski solidify their belief that a brewery could be possible on the reservation.

The brewery would also be small enough that it wouldn’t be able to produce a lot of beer, limiting its production and distribution into the community. They believed the brewery wouldn’t turn into one of the regular bars just a few blocks away, because of the regulations.

“We said, ‘Let’s just see how it goes, if it’s an issue, if it’s something that’s going to be harmful to the community, in that people are coming in, consuming and going out and being irresponsible, we will close it down the next day,’” Sansaver said. “But, by and large, if they’re going to do it, they’d do it without us being open anyway.”

BY 7 P.M., there was hardly any room to move, let alone get into the packed brew-



EVEN AT capacity, the calm atmosphere of Missouri Breaks Brewing challenges the drinking culture on a reservation troubled by alcoholism and an unemployment rate hovering around 50 percent. The Sansaver and Zilkoski families use the brewery as an extension of their living room: Meals, jam sessions, meetings, afternoon naps for the grandkids and reunions for old friends all take place in a home masquerading as a pub.

ery. The tables were full, and the bar was jammed with customers trying to get the bartender’s attention.

Jeff and Julie Neubauer, residents of Wolf Point, wanted to get their two growlers filled for the weekend. So the couple squeezed their way up the bar, glass jugs in tow.

The two finally found an open spot between two customers. The sole bartender, Alonna Sansaver, hustled down the length of the bar, frantically taking and filling

orders. Her uncle, Mark Sansaver, had already left for the night, but Zilkoski was still there.

“Can we get three Big Beavers?” a customer shouts.

“I need some too,” another one says.

Beginning to fill the first of the glasses, Alonna Sansaver takes the time to catch her breath and look around. Jeff and Julie are standing just across the bar, growlers on the counter, ready to be filled.

Alonna Sansaver mentally jots down the Neubauers’ order: Fill both growlers with Big Beaver Belchin’ Ale, \$20, two pints of Big Beaver, \$8, and start a tab.

Foam begins to sputters out at Alonna Sansaver from the tap. In just one afternoon, the brewery had gone through an entire keg of Big Beaver.

Opening up the refrigerated cooler under the tap, she grabbed the empty 15.5 gallon keg and shuffled with it to the brew room in the back of the pub. She wheeled another keg back through the waiting crowd of people, eager to get one last beer before closing time.

“Can I get one of those?” a customer asks.

“Me too,” another one says, as she hooked the keg up to the tap.

Alonna Sansaver grabbed some fresh glasses and began pouring more Big Beaver.

Sips and nods of approval from the customers, and she began picking up payment, depositing it in the cash register. Looking at her tally sheet, she saw one of the customers had his fourth beer and was done for the night. But it’s now 8 p.m., closing time, so it won’t matter.

“Last call,” Alonna Sansaver shouted out to the crowd milling about already putting on their coats. They were already aware of the time.

Some were headed home, others down the street to the Elks, Arlo’s and Dad’s to continue the night. A few had been there for hours, but most just came for a drink or two with friends before going elsewhere.

The brewery is a starting place for a lot of people, said Mark Sansaver. But it’s also a social establishment. The brewery isn’t there to be a beacon of social responsibility for the community. It’s there as an outlet for people to enjoy a couple quality brews. ▽

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THE CHIPPEWA Cree Tribal Justice Center opened in 2012 and cost nearly \$14 million to build. The center was designed to house 30 adults and 18 juveniles, along with the Rocky Boy's Police Department.

DREAMING OF DETENTION

OVERCOMING THE LIMITS OF FEDERAL FUNDING
ON THE ROCKY BOY'S RESERVATION

STORY BY JORDON NIEDERMEIER
PHOTOS BY TOMMY MARTINO

IT WAS midnight in the parking lot of a Billings Walmart. The night air chilled Sue LaMere's Ford Taurus. She didn't have a blanket to share with her daughter, so she cranked the ignition to blast the heat. It was all she could do to make her 12-year-old girl more comfortable.

LaMere couldn't sleep. Cramped in the driver's seat, her mind was fixed on the trip's misery.

The Ford blew a tire during the 350-mile journey from the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. With no other options, she called a roadside tire service and it took all the money she had to get it moving again.

Then the car broke down a second time. It had to be towed to a garage in Miles City. The parts alone cost more than \$400. The bill forced LaMere to call her ex-husband for money so she could continue on the road.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

This was LaMere's first trip to visit her son, Jared, who was locked up in a juvenile detention center in Busby, Montana. She declined to talk about the crime that sent him away. Instead she focused on the situation. He was her son, he was 15 years old, and she had to see him. He had not yet earned phone privileges, so contact with family was limited to weekend visits.

The drive to the Northern Cheyenne Youth Detention Center should have taken less than seven hours. It took LaMere four days. And yet, just 10 minutes into her drive on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, Lamere passed a brand new juvenile detention facility that could have housed her son.

She lamented the irony of her position as she passed by the building, unaware of how long her trip was going to be. She knew that even though part of the structure was built to hold juveniles, the Chippewa Cree couldn't afford to staff it.

After obtaining a \$12.3 million federal grant in 2009, the tribe built a new justice center, consisting of tribal police headquarters, an adult jail and a juvenile detention center. However, the progress

stopped there as the tribe failed to secure funds to actually run the detention center.

While adult inmates and the Rocky Boy's Police Department have called the facility home since 2012, not a single juvenile has spent a night there. Instead, they're still sent to Great Falls, about two hours away, or Busby, seven hours, depending on the length of their incarceration.

The Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, which is as economically challenged as most tribal nations, has managed to secure a considerable amount of funding from outside grants to pay for programs and much needed infrastructure, like constructing a juvenile detention wing.

However, maintaining those grants, finding money to run the juvenile detention wing, requires creativity in both tribal planning and grant writing. On that end, the Chippewa Cree tribe has had trouble keeping up with its own successes.

LaMere said she harbors resentment because she wants to be there for her child, to see him as much as possible.

"It bothers me that we have a facility sitting there. Which I think if you're in the business sense, you anticipate and project the cost that it would take to



THE CLOSED juvenile detention center also affects family members of the juveniles, such as Sue LaMere. Her son, Jared, committed a more serious offense, so the tribal courts decided he needed to be incarcerated for a longer period of time. Her son has spent the last two years in a Bureau of Indian Affairs' facility in Busby, seven hours away on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation.

operate the facility," LaMere said. "You should have appropriated the money or planned for the money and figured out the cost when you were building it. That's just part of business management."

JIM SWAN, a resident and enrolled Chippewa Cree tribal member, is the chief executive officer of RJS & Associates, a grant-writing and management firm in Box Elder. He also works closely with the Chippewa Cree Business Committee, the tribe's governing body, to find the outside funding necessary to maintain services in a challenged economy.

Every morning Swan grabs a cup of coffee and prints off what he calls his "daily digest," a list of every federal grant

that's open for application. Then he sits behind a U-shaped desk and scans the papers for answers to his community's prayers.

Swan moved home to Montana after living in Illinois and attending graduate school at the University of Chicago. He withdrew before receiving a degree, but it was in that city that his career in grant writing started. Twenty years later, he's the CEO of the company his father started.

Like most tribes, the Chippewa Cree rely heavily on federal grants to pay for everything on the reservation their operating budget can't cover. But resident grant writers like the ones working at RJS & Associates are an unusual occurrence on a reservation.

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ROLAND NEZ, the adult probation officer for the Chippewa Cree tribe, says hello to an inmate on the adult portion of the detention center. Nez is the tribe's only adult probation officer, so he has made contact with almost every person incarcerated.

Jim Swan is an asset to the community, and he knows it.

"Rocky Boy is lucky to have us here. We've been very successful for our tribe, our school district, our college. We've helped out other reservations, but just the fact we're based physically here really helps our tiny reservation," Swan said.

Since 1996, the firm secured more than \$300 million in grants. Much of that money went to Rocky Boy's. They've funded programs like the drug court, creating an option for drug offenders to receive treatment over incarceration. The firm also helped create a recreation center and found grants to construct the justice center.

"A lot of the time, our clients just know: 'We have this issue, and we have some sort of vague ideas how we might tackle it,'" Swan said.

Swan takes those ideas and formulates a concrete plan with goals and objectives and sees the project through to the point of evaluating how effective it was after implementation.

IN 2009, RJS helped the Chippewa Cree tribe secure the federal grant to build the new detention facility and police headquarters. The tribe also used more than \$1 million of its own money to construct the new Chippewa Cree Tribal Justice Center.

According to tribal officials, when the tribe applied for the grant that paid for the construction of the justice center, the Chippewa Cree planned on receiving the operating money for the facility from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, they only received a third of what they expected.

The center consists of two wings that are nearly identical. Each side has 18 cells, nine for men and nine for women, with a concrete slab topped with a thin pad for a bed, a stainless steel toilet and sink, and a mirror bolted to the wall.

Sue LaMere toured the building after construction and has seen where Jared could have spent his time.

LaMere's son could have played cards on a concrete picnic table in a communal area that occupies the space between the cells and the outer secure wall. Inmates are allowed to socialize there, and he would have been with people from his community.

He could have eaten meals from the full kitchen and played basketball in the justice center's indoor recreation room.

LaMere also saw the visitation area, a

room, just minutes from her home, that she said would have benefited her son more than anything.

Jared has been detained on the Northern Cheyenne reservation for more than two years.

At first LaMere tried to visit him every couple weeks, depending on her finances. It was difficult telling her son she couldn't make it if he asked her to come when he had a hard week.

"You don't want to tell your kid that's in jail, incarcerated, that you can't come down because you don't have the money," LaMere said. "We have to figure out, like, I'm going to skip this bill this month because I need to be there for him."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Now she visits about once a month and makes sure she has extra funds to cover any emergencies.

AN EMPTY juvenile detention center could say good things about a community. All the children obey the law and their parents. They go to class and they never drink, smoke, or mess with drugs. But in Rocky Boy's, they export their troubled youth.

The grant covered only construction costs. Operational expenses seem to have been overlooked. The tribe still has not managed to find a way to pay for staff because of the more extensive needs of juvenile detention.

The tribe would have to pay for education programs and hire tutors. Corrections officers would be required to undergo additional training to monitor minors. The facility would also need trained, specialized counselors.

The jail sits empty because the tribal government can't afford the required personnel.

LaMere lost contact with her son even before he was sent to Busby to serve his sentence.

Steve Henry, lieutenant of operations of the Rocky Boy's Police Department, said children charged with serious crimes are sent to the nearest active detention center in Great Falls, 100 miles and nearly two hours away.

Sometimes, youths are handcuffed to chairs for up to four hours, waiting to be transported.

Sending juveniles to Great Falls does not come free either. According to Henry, it costs the tribe \$210 for every day the child is detained.

Henry said his daughter was sent to Great Falls juvenile detention center before being held in Busby.

He said she faced racial prejudice by some of the staff members there and he questions the qualifications and knowledge of the people providing treatment.

Russell Hoell considers himself a full-time activist and was once a court advocate in Rocky Boy's. He has had two children go through the juvenile criminal justice system, and he said the Great Falls detention center is not a good place for Chippewa Cree youth.

According to Hoell, the officers there don't know the children under their supervision.



He said there are multiple self-identifying gangs on Rocky Boy's, and when they get sent to Great Falls, that is not taken into consideration. When they are detained in the same holding areas, violence can break out, according to Hoell, who said his son was a member of one of the gangs.

The Great Falls Juvenile Detention Center is the closest option for the Rocky Boy's Police Department, but in some cases, they have no option at all.

Police in Rocky Boy's can't detain minors arrested for possession of controlled substances or intoxication. Great Falls won't accept juveniles for such small offences. Juveniles frequently skip court dates and because of existing tribal laws they aren't punished.

Henry said this is all well known on the reservation, and juveniles take advantage of it.

Tribal police can't hold intoxicated children at the justice center long enough to sober up, and Henry said the department is forced to release them back to the same environment that caused the initial arrest. Sometimes that leads to a juvenile being arrested multiple times in one day.

"I've taken a kid home, I dropped her off," Henry said. "(I) stood there at the door, said, 'You going to go in and go to bed?' She said, 'Yeah, I'll behave.' Got in my vehicle, got to the end of the block, and dispatcher is sending me right back to the house because she's fist-fighting with mom."

ROCKY BOY'S Business Council member Dustin Whitford said the tribe doesn't even want to use the word detention when describing the new facility. He said the focus should be on treatment and recovery for mental health and addiction.

Sue LaMere's son is set to be released this month but she said he could have benefited from time spent in the facility Whitford imagines.

After his incarceration, he was counseled for anger management issues and doctors have diagnosed him with ADHD and bipolar disorder. LaMere said the diagnoses changed frequently and it created frustration for her family. She never spoke to his health care providers because of the distance. She felt disconnected from his treatment.

Lenore Myers-Nault is the director of White Sky Hope Center, an addiction treatment center on Rocky Boy's. She said families can sometimes become a barrier in the rehabilitation process for teens, but family support is vital for success.

While she thinks incarceration is more harmful than helpful for less severe offenders, she said it can be productive for troubled youth who lack support from their families.

"We're not focusing on jail-based programs, but it's hard to get people through the door," Myers-Nault said. "The families are like, 'I don't want my children in jail, but they're still dealing with addictions.'"

Although Myers-Nault said White Sky has no communication with the justice center regarding juvenile services, she does have staff trained to work with youth.

Whitford said providing the services in-house would also allow them to incorporate cultural aspects in their treatment. Even though the Busby juvenile detention center is located on a reservation, it's a different tribe and that needs to be considered because there are different customs and beliefs.

LaMere thinks the distance from his family has been more difficult for him than anything and hindered his long-term goals. His grandmother is ill, and because of the distance, he never gets to see her.

"He shouldn't have had to go to all these places and be incarcerated somewhere when we have our own facility that's here. You know we don't have the money to run it, we don't have the trained staff to do it, but if he had been here at least he would be with our own people," LaMere said.

"I think he could get more help. He would be more comfortable. He would be, I guess, calmer. Calmer because his family would be around him and he would not have the loneliness that he has to live with."

JIM SWAN said programs without self-supporting business plans often die when the federal dollars stop coming in. Developing a plan to keep programs running after their grants end has become more important to getting funding in recent years.

"We have to think about sustainabil-

ity three years down the road, five years down the road, knowing full well things are going to change," Swan said.

According to him, the state of economy and changing project leadership are two of the biggest factors that lead to changes in available financing. He has to "look through a crystal ball" when he writes an application and try to predict how the tribe can get through unforeseen obstacles.

When the tribe realized it would not have enough money to operate the juvenile facility, it was left scrambling for a shot in the arm. They identified and applied for a grant with the potential to open the juvenile wing of the justice center.

Beau Mitchell, the Rock Boy's planning and development director, said the Edward Byrne grant is highly competitive but could get the ball rolling on a path to the center's sustainability. He said getting the money to open the facility would create possible revenue streams that could at least partially cover its operational costs.

Like Jim Swan, Mitchell left the reservation to pursue his education but came back to make a positive impact on his community.

The business council called on him to find ways to free up money for the tribal services, and he decided to take a progressive approach.

"They asked how they could make cuts. Instead, I looked how to make revenue," Mitchell said.

Mitchell wrote a business plan outlining steps the tribe can take to make the juvenile detention center self-sustaining. He said instead of paying to send kids to Great Falls, they can open their facility to neighboring reservations.

"It's conflicting because your operation is contingent on people committing crimes," Mitchell said.

But he thinks that it makes good business sense. The tribe can offer a service and make it the best available by having a convenient location and offering higher quality treatment by incorporating other tribal entities like White Sky Hope Center.

"We have all the pieces here. We just need to organize them and put them together," Mitchell said.

According to Swan, programs with measurable success, like graduation rates or recidivism reduction, have a better chance at survival even if they aren't self-



1) THE JUVENILE detention center sits empty not because of lack of crime, but because of lack of funding. Jim Swan, his late father Robert Swan and their grant writers secured \$12.5 million of the \$14 million required to build the structure, but it was not enough to run the entire center. The tribe managed to open the adult side using their compact dollars.

2) STEVE HENRY, lieutenant of operations for the Rocky Boy's Police Department, and fellow officers have to deal with the consequences of a nonfunctioning juvenile detention center on a daily basis. Juveniles have caught on to the fact that if they cooperate with the office, they are merely cited and can evade detention.

3) JAMES "JIM" SWAN is the CEO of RJS & Associates, a small grant-writing firm based out of a modest house near Rocky Boy Agency. Swan and his grant-writing team have brought more than \$300 million to the Chippewa Cree tribe.

sustaining. He can use that data to make an application for another grant more competitive.

If Rocky Boy's juvenile detention center opens, the success of the facility and its programs will improve its odds at receiving future grant money, thereby making services sustainable, if not grant

free, in Swan's opinion.

"The best way I'd like to approach the section of sustainability on the front end really doesn't fly so well, but we're going to come back and ask you for another grant. If we're telling the truth, that's likely what we're going to do." ▽

