

9-27-2002

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University of Dayton

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Recommended Citation

University of Dayton, "American Indian Youths to Participate in "Lakota's Bridge," Plans in Works to Build a Peace House to Honor Slain Teen-Ager" (2002). *News Releases*. 9968.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/9968

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Sept. 27, 2002
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NEWS RELEASE

AMERICAN INDIAN YOUTHS TO PARTICIPATE IN "LAKOTA'S BRIDGE," PLANS IN WORKS TO BUILD A PEACE HOUSE TO HONOR SLAIN TEEN-AGER

DAYTON, Ohio — Standing Rock Indian Reservation sits 1,200 miles away from Dayton, but Mary Anne Angel is working on building a cultural bridge.

Teen-agers from the impoverished South Dakota reservation will travel to the University of Dayton for an Oct. 10-11 youth exchange dubbed "Lakota's Bridge."

Plans are also in the works to construct a local Lakota Madison Peace House and a Medicine Wheel Healing House, envisioned as facilities for building student leaders and treating youths with addictions. Students from UD's Habitat for Humanity chapter and other organizations have offered to help construct the facilities in the Dayton area if a fund-raising drive is successful, according to Angel.

The October youth exchange and the envisioned peace house are named after Lakota Madison, a 17-year-old who was tortured and murdered on the isolated reservation just months after visiting campus for the first exchange called "Circle of Light" in March 2001. Off the reservation for the first time, she had hoped to enroll at UD.

Instead, she became part of an all-too-familiar statistic on the reservation. American Indian children are among the nation's most at-risk kids. "Homicide is the leading cause of death for American Indian females between the ages of 15 and 34, according to the U.S. census," said Angel, a lecturer in the communication department at UD who's spent parts of the last three summers living on the reservation and discovering her own American Indian heritage. "Lakota came out to Dayton and saw there was another world. Do you know what it does for kids to come off a reservation and see another world? They're empowered."

The Standing Rock delegation is expected to include Madison's brother and sister and members of Madison's Unity Group, youth who have either gotten out of gangs or avoided them.

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Some are traditional dancers, who will perform in typical regalia. Among the adults in the contingent are "sun dancers," storytellers and quilt makers.

The Dayton delegation includes youths from the Miami Valley Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, The Dream Shop (an after-school program for girls from an underprivileged neighborhood in East Dayton), the Alpha School, Miami Valley School, Our Lady of Mercy and Meadowdale and Xenia high schools.

"The problems they have on the reservation we have right here in our own community. Overwhelmingly, there's common ground," said Angel, pointing to issues like poverty, suicide and alcohol and drug use. "In academia, we do a lot of research and scholarly talking about the issues, which is good, but we often don't bring to the forum the people in the trenches. We need to let them speak for themselves. They have a voice."

At the two-day event, Angel and independent filmmaker Dave Weinkauff will show "Buffalo Woman," a 40-minute documentary that uses stories from elders and the murder of Madison to illustrate the plight of teen-agers on the reservation. Incarcerated youths will talk about their experience with an American Indian recovery program. Graduates of the Miami Valley Juvenile Rehabilitation Center and representatives from the newly formed Medicine Wheel Healing House Nonprofit will talk about a pilot aftercare program that's fashioned after an American Indian philosophy. On the second day, small groups from the reservation and Dayton will propose solutions to some of the problems they face and create a mural to promote friendship. Host families will open up their homes to the delegation from Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

Standing Rock, with an estimated 86 percent unemployment rate, is home to 5,800 Lakota Sioux Indians, according to Angel. "Lakota's Bridge" is the latest initiative between Dayton and the reservation. The Miami Valley Council for Native Americans, which is also involved in the event, annually delivers clothing, school supplies and computers donated by area residents and businesses to the reservation.

"Lakota's Bridge" is funded, in part, by a grant from UD's Program for Christian Leadership, a Lilly Endowment program to develop opportunities for students, faculty and staff to explore their lives as a vocation. Approximately 25 UD students are helping Angel organize and run the event.