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Reviving an Archery Tradition

The Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in South Central South Dakota is one of the newest locations to begin implementation of the *National Archery in the Schools Program* (NASP). On February 18, 2008 three Native Americans from the legendary tribe, "Sicangu Oyate" completed a workshop to become "Basic Archery Instructor Trainers" for the 1-year old South Dakota NASP.

Organization of this training workshop was accomplished by, Curt Robertson the NASP Coordinator for the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. The training was conducted at the Georgia Morse Middle School gymnasium in Pierre, South Dakota (pronounced "Peer, South Dakota" for all you French-influenced readers). Joining the 20 South Dakota volunteers and teachers at this workshop was the new NASP Coordinator for Wyoming, Zack Sexton and veteran NASP Coordinator for Minnesota, Kraig Kiger. Both Zack and Kraig were upgrading their training to expand their home programs.

A unique flavor to this workshop was provided by the enthusiastic participation of three residents of the Sicangu Oyate tribe on the Rosebud; Kevin Decora, Julius Walking Crow, and Melvin Hollow Horn Bear. Kevin explained the tribe's name means "burnt thigh people" and is used to record a significant incident in the tribe's history. According to elders, early in their history a rival tribe tried to kill them by setting fire to the land where they lived. An ingenious grandmother advised everyone to lie down and cover themselves with dirt to ward off the fire. Apparently, as they lay on the ground covered in dirt, some were burned on the thighs. According to legend, only those who took her advice survived the attack. Kevin, Melvin, and Julius were popular with instructors and fellow trainees as they had fun but took the training very seriously. Kevin had recently begun shooting a bow, while Julius and Melvin remembered shooting as youngsters using bent, sinew reinforced willow stick bows made by their uncles. All were preparing themselves to take the NASP lessons back to the 2,000 students in their eleven schools. Kevin reported that archery interest has been kept alive for their youth due to efforts by Rosebud archers Mike One Star Sr. and Gary Hacker. As new NASP trainers, Kevin, Melvin and Julius look forward to taking modern equipment and proven teaching and shooting techniques home to build upon the good work of Mike and Gary.

Kevin, who is earning a Master's Degree in clinical psychology and mental health, has very high hopes for the influence NASP can have on the futures of local youngsters. Kevin explained that suicide rates, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and neglect are all too high on the Rosebud. Kevin said, "We really wanted to bring a program into our communities that could work for all kids at all athletic levels. We also wanted a program that was safe and showed success in working with youth in the communities. The NASP covers all these areas. If we can get this program going we might be able to change the lives of some young people. Hopefully, we can get them down the right road."

Kevin, Melvin, and Julius were pretty "normal" NASP trainees during most of the three days. They learned and practiced becoming Basic Archery Instructor Trainers (BAIT). They were enthusiastic, eager to shoot, and willing to change some archery habits and toss out a few form myths they had picked up over time. However, their demeanor changed when it came time, on day two, to see if the pressure of mock competition could break their archery form, shot execution, or follow-through. Melvin pinned his long black hair back with a headband, Julius melded into some type of trance, and Kevin...well Kevin kept on being Kevin, not able to stop joking and poking fun, even in the heat of battle! Kevin focused on the "Eleven Steps to Archery Success" and made sure to "paint his face" when following through after dropping the bowstring. Melvin appeared to mumble something as his archer's hook was anchored in the corner of his smile – some of us accused him of calling the target closer. Julius, handled his arrows with a reverence that causes the arrows flight to move towards the target's center in slow motion.

Every NASP training workshop is special and unique in some way. The new state, provincial, or country launches of the NASP are exciting because these are further proof that everyone working in or supporting the NASP is on to something special. Follow-up or advanced NASP workshops are exciting because they are indicative of a NASP effort preparing to accelerate expansion into more schools for thousands more students. This mid-February workshop in "Peer", South Dakota will always be memorable to me because of Curt Robertson's attention to organizational details and Kevin, Melvin, and Julius. I could not help wonder at the irony of the situation. As the first archer in my lineage I've started a tradition of archery in my family. These three Sicangu Oyates are striving to revive an archery tradition in theirs. For more information about the NASP and how you can help please contact us at (608) 260-0832 or www.archeryingtheschools.org.