

The Four Winds

Newsletter of the American Indian Alaska Native Employees Association for NRCS (AIANEA)

Job Opening!

Here is a rare opportunity for a NRCS job in remote Alaska. Dillingham has thousands of years of Native inhabitation, culture, and knowledge about the land. As the landscape becomes more developed with a diverse complex of landownership, it is NRCS' exciting challenge to help shape the landscape in a sustainable way. Innovative practices like ATV trails to protect sensitive wildlife habitat, early succession development to enhance moose habitat, and plenty of salmon habitat enhancement would be a biologist's dream. A serene place to live, Dillingham is surrounded by coniferous forests, miles of tundra, expansive lake chains accessible by boat, and plenty of fresh ocean breeze to calm your mind. It is the challenge of innovative practices, something which you may never have the opportunity for in the lower 48, that will keep you here. Field work travel is done by truck, ATV, boat, small aircraft, and occasionally snowmachine ("snowmobile" if you're not from Alaska). A lifetime of learning awaits you.

This is a GS-11/12 District Conservationist position and it closes on October 24th. The vacancy announcement is 08-NRCSAK-19A on www.usajobs.gov As you will see in the announcement, the area includes a 25% cost of living allowance, a 25% relocation bonus, housing temporarily provided by the agency to ease your transition, and a 25% retention bonus. http://jobsearch.usajobs.gov/jobsearch.asp?q=NRCS&jbf574=AG16&lid=317&jbf522=&salmin=&salmax=&paygrademin=11&paygrademax=12&fedEmp=Y&tm=&sort=rv&vw=d&ss=0&brd=3876&FedPub=Y&caller=%2Fagency_search.asp&SUBMIT1.x=72&SUBMIT1.y=16

Congratulations to Dr. Carol Crouch, AIANEA Member and District Conservationist in Purcell, Oklahoma for being selected to serve in the collateral duties of National American Indian/Alaska Native Program Manager for NRCS nationwide! Dr. Crouch replaces Jerry Rouse, State Range Management Specialist in Washington state."



Fall - Niibin 2008

Respect, Harmony, and Beauty

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Congratulations!

Congratulations to AIANEA's new secretary—**Blythe Koyiyumptewa** and new Midwest Representative, **Sharron Santure**.

Welcome and good luck!

Patrick Broyles hopes his experience will help in the Middle East

EMPORIA, Kan. - Soil conservation and range management expert Patrick Broyles hopes his experience working with Indian country farmers will help their Iraqi counterparts to improve crops in Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

Just how the planting knowledge of generations of American Indian elders will fit into the 5,000-year-old traditions of the "cradle of civilization" won't be clear until he gets to know the Iraqi farmers, but both groups love to put their hearts into the soil to produce vegetables and fruits for the survival of their nations.

From 2001 to 2005, Broyles worked on plant issues at the Manhattan (Kansas) Plant Materials Center with about a dozen American Indian tribes in Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

That experience with Native nations will help Broyles, whose maternal grandfather had ties to the Cherokee and Creek tribes in Oklahoma and to the Choctaw Nation, to work with local officials in Iraqi provinces.

"I am used to working with the official government of a tribe - every tribe has an officer - and most tribes have elders and respected people who guide the tribe on certain issues," said Broyles, a former military translator who now works for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"My experience working with elders will help me in Iraq because a lot of villages are socially like Indian tribes in America - they have elders who guide them. I will be working with Iraqi elders to find out their needs and the best way to address those needs."

On loan to the U.S. State Department, Broyles will be an agriculture adviser on one of numerous Provincial Reconstruction Teams that include experts in many fields.

In going to Iraq, Broyles has again mustered the same courage it took to serve his country during the Vietnam War. At age 20, Broyles decoded secret messages for the U.S. Army Security Agency - a job that gave him migraines. Trading cryptanalysis for becoming a courier and translator for military intelligence, Broyles saw "lots of different parts of Vietnam." Broyles' missions included the emergency interrogation of a captured North Vietnamese colonel.

"He was badly wounded and they didn't think he could make the helicopter ride back and they sent me to him to see what we could find," said Broyles.

Despite his youthful bravery, Broyles' mother told him when he was a child not to speak of his American Indian roots fearing he'd be sent to one of the notorious boarding schools. As an adult, he has embraced his heritage including serving the past five years as chair of the Society of American Indian Government Employees.

"I identify with my Native heritage considerably," he said. "I think it's important because I want to reclaim what my family had lost."

Broyles is believed to be the first American Indian PRT member to assist Iraqi farmers.

"We are very excited to have Patrick and other minority groups as part of the group going over," said Larry Trouba, special projects officer for Iraq and Afghanistan in the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service Development Resources and Disaster Assistance Division. "We're very happy to be sending someone with Patrick's experience and background."

Divorced "with no social life," Broyles said he was ready for some adventure as he turned 58 on July 5.

"I don't have a wife or a steady girlfriend, so it's a good time for me to go - there is nothing to tie me down," said Broyles, the father of one son, Joshua, who joined the U.S. Army Reserves after graduating last year from high school.

"We are a very conservative patriotic family," Broyles said.

"I am proud of him," said Joshua Broyles, 19, in the Army Reserves.

"He's always seemed proud of his time in the Army and it seems like he'd enjoy going to Iraq because of that," Joshua Broyles said. "I am pretty confident about the situation in Iraq right now and statistically the chances of something happening are pretty low."

Patrick Broyles said his son "is concerned that it's not like going to the Caribbean, but the odds are I will be fine."

"Joshua told me he was very proud of me for going to Iraq," said the equally proud father

Farming Iraq

by: Greg Peterson

2008 Annual Meeting Update

EMBRACING THE DIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST: CULTURE, CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY.

The 2008 Joint Employee Training Conference, held in Spokane, Washington, from August 11th through August 15th, was the second joint employee training conference held together by two Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employee associations. The American Indian Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANEA) and the Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO) demonstrated their effective planning and partnership skills to produce an excellent joint training conference for NRCS employees.

The joint training conference offered NRCS employees the opportunity to network with other NRCS employees to learn more about NRCS conservation work being implemented across the nation. NRCS employees received training and an opportunity to be mentored by members of the National Leadership Team to help them improve their career advancement. Employees learned more about NRCS programs; received training that provided them with tools to improve their communication skills; cultural awareness training; information and training through workshops, posters and general session presentations that demonstrated successful NRCS partnerships, delivery of conservation to all populations, diversity of the conservation work; and the effectiveness of NRCS services. The AIANEA and APIO planning committee worked effectively with the National Emphasis Program Managers for American Indian Alaska Native and Asian American Pacific Islanders to provide a certified training course for NRCS Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs). In addition to training at the joint conference; the agenda included evening activities such as; live auction to fund diversity scholarships for students seeking degrees related to NRCS careers; association business meetings; awards luncheon to honor each association's finest members and their student scholarship winners; and networking social events.

The success of this joint training conference could not have happened without the joint and individual association planning committees and the local

planning committee; which included NRCS employees in Washington and most importantly the support of NRCS State Conservationist for Washington, Gus Hughbanks.

by: Dr. Carol Crouch

To see the full conference report: go to www.aianea.com—on the quick links, click on: AIANEA/APIO Summary Report 2008.



2008 AIANEA Awards Recipients

Outstanding Member

Felix Nez, Jr.

Award of Excellence

Jerry Thompson

Mentor Award

Herb Webb

Leadership Award

Crystal Leonetti

President's Award

Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen

Yvette Dulle

Recognition:

John McCoy

Deborah Clairmont

Dr. Carol Crouch

Crystal Leonetti

Scholarship Info



The AIANEA Scholarship Committee received six applications for the two \$500 scholarships that are available from AIANEA. These scholarships are for the 2008 – 2009 school year. All of the applications are from good students and are very hard to

decide who should be awarded the scholarships. The first scholarships that were awarded were for \$150 and we are now up \$500, mostly due to the support of everyone that attends the national conference and buys items from the auctions.

The AIANEA has made arrangements so that anyone can have an automatic deduction from your paycheck and have it sent directly to the AIANEA scholarship fund. The deduction can be from \$1 to whatever you can afford per paycheck. A

deduction of \$5.00 per check adds up to about \$130 a year and it's tax deductible!

This is a very exciting time for the Scholarship Committee because with your help at the auctions and donations, we are now looking at some long term investments for the scholarship funds so we can eventually use just the interest the funds earn for the scholarships. With your continued support, we can keep increasing the dollar amounts of the scholarships and possibly increase the number of scholarships we give. The students that receive the scholarships are very grateful for the help.

If you have any questions about the scholarships, the process we go through to award them or would like to help out on the scholarship committee, contact Kurt Cates at kurt.cates@id.usda.gov or 208-478-3778.

Thank you all for your support.

Scholarships

Meet AIANEA Scholarship Recipients

James Cole Guardipee

James is from Alaska and is a member of the Haida Itlingit Tribe of Alaska.

He is attending Blackfeet Community College in Montana and will graduate with an Associates degree in Natural Resources studies. He would like to continue on to get a Bachelors and Masters degree in some form of natural resource studies.

James is married and has two children. James thoroughly enjoys the outdoors, especially riding horses. He is a member of his college rodeo team. James is very involved with the community activities in Montana, helping with elders and other community events.

Scott Doherty

Scott is a current NRCS employee who needed to take a college course to help his future advancement opportunities. He attended summer school and has already completed the course needed.

Scott lives in Wisconsin with his wife and two children. He has lived and worked in Wisconsin and Missouri his whole life in his words “spending time outdoors in pursuit of something cold and slimy”.

He and his family enjoy the outdoors and spend as much time as possible camping, canoeing and hiking. His love of the outdoors has been passed down to his kids, as they are often seen with toad or snake in hand.



Youth Summit Draws Huge Crowd

The Choctaw Nation Event Center was the site for the “Xtreme Ability is Power” Youth Summit 2008. This event, sponsored by the Choctaw Nation, Big Five Community Services, Southern Workforce Board, KEDDO, Southeastern Workforce Board, Chickasaw Nation, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Citizen Pottawatomie Nation, OK Department of Career Tech, Kiamichi Technology Center, Governor’s State Youth Council, Department of Rehabilitation Services and the OK Department of Commerce, is continuing to grow as youth and young adults from all over the state of Oklahoma flock to this annual event that began in 2007.

Jasper Parker, Assistant State Conservationist for Outreach and Civil Rights, Ann Colyer, Tribal Resource Conservationist to the Choctaw Nation, Paul May, District Conservationist, Durant FO attended the Youth Summit in Durant. The Youth Summit was held on Thursday, July 10. The event was designed to motivate and inspire youth and young adults ages 14 to 21 about their future.

The featured speakers and entertainment were: Jim Riley, former Miami Dolphin football player, D. J. Vanus, author, Richard Hight, artist, Choctaw Youth Council, Team AcroDunk-Acrobatic Slam Dunking and the Chickasaw Martial Arts Group.

There were approximately 1,500 people that attended this event, 1,400 of them being youth. Each youth received a sack lunch, an “Xtreme Ability” t-shirt and gym bag filled with occupational and educational material along with other goodies.



Member Spotlight: Athena Pratt Soil Conservationist, American Samoa

10 Questions with The Four Winds

Tell everyone a little bit about yourself?

I was born in Colorado, but we lived in New Mexico when I was little before moving to Puerto Rico. I attended 1st through 4th grade in Puerto Rico and learned to speak Spanish. We moved back to Las Cruces, New Mexico, so that my dad could finish his Master's degree. My parents wanted to experience more of the world, so we moved to Belize where I attended high school. Growing up in Belize was a great experience and it was my first exposure to wildlife conservation efforts both in forests and coral reefs. I moved to Hawaii for college and my intention was to study marine science. But I would get sick every time I went out on a boat, so I switched to agriculture with an emphasis on economics, because I wanted to promote sustainable food production. I lived in Hawaii for 13 years before moving to American Samoa. I have 4 children and have been married to my husband, Aaron, for 15 years. My mom is a tribal member of the Isleta Pueblo just south of Albuquerque and I hope to work with tribes in New Mexico and Arizona someday.

How did you come to your current position?

I was a junior in college when I saw a stack of applications for SCEP in my soils professor's lab. I took an application and gave one to a friend. We were both selected and have been with NRCS since 2001. I was able to work one summer in New Mexico and that was good since I was able to meet a lot of other employees. As soon as I was converted to a career employee I started as a SEPM. I have worked as Hispanic and American Indian SEPM and have enjoyed learning about the importance of networking and working with the employee organizations. I worked for 3 years in Hawaii and a few weeks after my daughter was born I saw a vacancy for GS 11 Soil Conservationist in American Samoa. It was tempting, but I passed on it. The vacancy was re-advertised a few months later and I was then ready to apply. So I have been here for 3 years.



What was the most challenging obstacle you overcame to achieve this position?

The most challenging obstacle to being in my current position was getting my family settled in a new location. My husband and kids have been supportive of us moving so far away, but I did have to bribe them a little. The kids are now enjoying school and their friends.

How can others follow in your foot steps?

I am very happy with where I am at and the work that I do. I encourage others, especially those starting out with NRCS, to always be willing to learn new things. Subscribe to magazines and journals to learn about what the private sector and other organizations are doing. Pay attention to details and have fun with your co-workers.

What is the most rewarding part of your current position?

The most rewarding part of my job is encouraging farmers to do what is right for the land, then having them come back and tell me how happy they are with the results. Having older, respected, male farmers trust what I, a younger lady, have to tell them is also very rewarding. But I am not so young anymore, so this is not as dramatic as it used to be.

What profession other than yours would you like to attempt?

Before I started working with NRCS I was thinking of working with the Food Agriculture Organization, which does a lot of the same things NRCS does, but internationally. Now I want to spend more time serving as a mentor for youth and children. I am a member of the Baha'i Faith and in the past few years several Baha'i training institutes have developed courses for pre-youth who are between ages 11-15. These courses teach the importance of service, how to be a good communicator, and how to achieve excellence. They help the youth to see and feel the love God has for us and how rewarding it is to have Faith. I have had a lot of fun working with kids and would like to dedicate more time to working with them. And if I were ever to win the lottery I would take time off to be a full time mom.

Did you have a mentor or what person has the most impact on you as an employee?

I feel really fortunate to have had 4 DC's who gave me guidance and allowed me to take on a lot of responsibility. They were also very hard workers and often out in the field elbow-to-elbow with the rest of the field staff. I will have a new supervisor soon and I expect that this change will provide me with new opportunities for growth.

What is your favorite saying or quote?

I love quotes and prayers. Here are a few quotes that I like:

“Nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Laughter is an instant vacation.” Milton Berle

“Some people tell me that motivation doesn't last. I tell them that bathing doesn't either. That's why I recommend it daily.” Zig Ziglar

What is your favorite word?

I like the word “Aloha”. It means more than a greeting. It is an expression of friendship and welcome. It is used sincerely and from the heart. Having experienced living in Hawaii I see that it is not just a phrase to attract tourists, rather a genuine expression that says, “I am happy to see you,” “I wish you the best,” and “I have love in my heart” all at the same time. There isn't anything in the English language quite the same as looking someone in the eye, smiling at them and saying “Aloha.”

What is something that you are looking forward to in this coming year?

I am looking forward to the implementation of a CNMP that I wrote last year that is a demonstration piggery at the American Samoa Land Grant. I am also helping another planner with a watershed plan that we would like to have ready for implementation this year. The focus of the watershed plan is protecting the coral reefs from sedimentation and other contaminants. We have been working closely with other local agencies on both of these projects and the teamwork effort at planning should result in on-the-ground conservation that other landowners can adopt.

Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency Partner hold a Tribal Conservation Meeting

A Tribal Conservation meeting was held on September 23, 2008 at the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Tribal Grounds in Shawnee, Oklahoma. The Citizen Potawatomi Nation hosted the event and provided the meal. The Citizen Potawatomi Nation Veterans Color Guard presented the colors and Citizen Potawatomi Nation language specialist, Justin Neely provided the opening prayer in his native language. Sponsorship partners included the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA). Welcome was presented by acting Executive Director, Darrel Dominick, for OTCAC; State Conservationist Ron Hilliard, for NRCS and State Executive Director, Jim Reese, for FSA

The Tribal meeting provided conservation program

Over sixty meeting attendees continue networking during meeting breaks



information that could provide assistance to Oklahoma Tribes and tribal members who are addressing conservation issues on their land as well as the preservation of Indian-held natural resources. Indian people have a deep abiding concern for both the wise use and the sustainability of their soil, water, air, plants, and animals. The meeting provided the opportunity for tribal leaders, tribal land managers, tribal conservation and environmental departments

and tribal farm managers the opportunity to meet and discuss with state and federal agencies the critical natural resources issues they are dealing with. There were eleven federal recognized tribes in attendance at the meeting; Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Cherokee Nation, Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Caddo Nation, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Caddo Tribe of Oklahoma, Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Otoe Missouri Tribe of Oklahoma, Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma with two out of state tribes represented.

Conservation program information was presented by Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Resource Conservation & Development, U.S. Geological Survey, and Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Other presenters included; Dr. Mundende from Langston University presented on conservation partnership efforts at Langston University, Brain Thomas from Indian Nation Conservation Alliance (INCA) presented on the opportunities for the development of Tribal Conservation Districts, Absentee Tribe of Oklahoma, Rod Camp, Randall Ware update attendees on the activities of the Kiowa Conservation District and Darrel Dominick presented for OTCAC their “New Direction” to assist Oklahoma tribes with their conservation issues. The meeting provided a networking opportunity for all in attendance. Many attendees ended the meeting by touring the Citizen Potawatomi Nation farm operations and Citizen Potawatomi Nation Cultural Center. Art Muller (OTCAC) and Dr. Carol Crouch (NRCS) were recognized for organizing the tribal meeting.

Meeting presenters have ‘Question & Answer Session with attendees



Oklahoma American Indian Artist Wins NRCS 2008 American Indian Heritage Month Poster Contest

The NRCS recognizes and celebrates each year the many different cultures to which we have the opportunity to offer our services and programs to; including American Indians. November has been designated as American Indian Heritage Month. This provides an opportunity to make people aware of the history of American Indians and their contributions to the world.

One of the ways NRCS nationally celebrates American Indian Heritage Month is by distributing a poster created by an American Indian artist. Each year artists from selected states have the opportunity to exhibit his/her talents and heritage on a national level. For 2008, the South Central Region, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, was chosen for 2008 American Indian Heritage Month poster competition; with NRCS Arkansas the lead state to oversee the poster contest.

The winning artist for 2008 American Indian Heritage month poster was Kathy Sturch, a member of the Choctaw Nation, Durant, Oklahoma. A panel of judges made up of Arkansas NRCS employees and Oklahoma State Conservationist, Ron Hilliard, made up the panel for this year's poster contest. The artist must capture the selected NRCS theme for the poster in their artwork. The poster theme for this year's poster was *Conservation... Our Passion... Our Heritage*. Kathy Sturch titled her painting *Touch of Earth... Conservation... Our Passion... Our Heritage* and she illustrated the connection the theme has with Choctaw's



Winning artist Kathy Sturch and NRCS Arkansas employee, Anderson Neal, feature the final review of artwork at the Durant field Office.

kinship with all creatures, earth, sky, water and the Indian Paintbrush in the foreground is symbolic of American Indians; natural, sturdy, proud and beautiful.

On August, 18, Anderson Neal, NRCS Arkansas, met with the Kathy Sturch and District Conservationist, Paul May, to review the final artwork for printing. The NRCS American Indian Heritage poster will be distributed to all NRCS states before October 15, 2008 and displayed in all NRCS offices across the Nation during American Indian Heritage month.



By: Dr. Carol Crouch

Partnership Saves Historical Idaho Site

Sometimes rivers possess a mind of their own. Case in point: the Snake River on the Fort Hall Reservation in eastern Idaho.

Members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have watched the river carve away three feet of soil annually toward the original Fort Hall site, a stopping place along the Oregon Trail and now a national historical monument. The area also contains sacred burial grounds and cultural artifacts.

Now a partnership between the Tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and NRCS is using BOR cost share, Farm Bill programs, and newer bioengineering techniques to protect the site.

“This is a demonstration to show Tribal members we can nudge the river back using natural means,” says Sam Hernandez, BIA engineer in Fort Hall.

The bioengineering practices include log jams and rock barbs to slow the water, create eddies and stabilize the bank. A continuous Conservation Reserve Program contract provided fencing to remove cattle from the banks. The Tribe also submitted an Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract this year for planting willows and native grasses.

“I’m proud of what we’ve done,” Hernandez says. “We have something on the ground and, hopefully, it will evolve into natural habitat over time.”

According to Laverne Bronco, environmental liaison for the Tribes, the project offers an educational opportunity. “We can have the kids from the Tribe plant the willows,” he says. “It will be our chance to explain why willows are important to the river and to our culture. We will also be able to show them how to care for this land. It’s our home and our future.”



Kurt Cates, Fort Hall District Conservationist, visits with Sam Hernandez and Laverne Bronco at the Fort Hall National Monument

Story by Jody Fagan, NRCS Conservation Communications Specialist, 208-378-5725.



Upriver of the Fort Hall National Monument. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes are working with NRCS and others to use bioengineering to stop the erosion.

NRCS and McClain County Conservation District Partner during local County Fair

On September 4, 5 and 6th 2008, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and McClain Conservation District partnered to have a conservation information and education booth at the McClain County Conservation Fair. The booth provided information for farmers, ranchers, and the students in McClain County. Over 145 students visited the booth during the three day event. Students received NRCS handouts such as; *Earth Team* bookmarks, *Backyard Conservation*, *Hometown Clean Workbook*, and *Water Cycle* poster. Approximately 309 farmer and ranchers visited the booth to receive valuable information on current conservation programs.



McClain County District Boards member Everett Wollenberg help with the McClain County and NRCS booth at the Conservation Fair.

NRCS American Indian Heritage Poster Highlight at 2008 Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival

The Choctaw Nation held their annual Labor Day Festival August 29 through September 1 at Tuskahoma, Oklahoma and during the festival the Choctaw Nation held their Annual Choctaw Art Show. On Friday, August 29th, LaDon Smith, winning artist for the NRCS American Indian Heritage, was present in the Choctaw Nation Tushka Homma Museum to autograph the 2007 NRCS Heritage posters for tribal members. LaDon autographed over 100 of the 500 poster distributed to tribal members during the festival.

On July 24, 2007, NRCS purchased the copyrights of the winning artwork from LaDon Smith. On this date, the artwork became the property of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); however, State Conservationist Ron Hilliard, made the decision to present the NRCS 2007 American Indian Heritage Poster original artwork to the Choctaw Nation. NRCS presented the artwork back to the Choctaw Nation during the 2007 annual Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival. Mr. Hilliard, representing NRCS, sincerely felt that all members of the Choctaw Nation should have the opportunity to enjoy the artwork that

was featured as NRCS 2007 American Indian Heritage Poster. The poster was disturbed in November 2007, across the Nation, to celebrate nationally American Indian Heritage Month. In November 2007, during American Indian Heritage Month, the Choctaw Nation officially hung the painting in the Choctaw Nation Tushka Homma Museum.

Since the posters were not released until November 2007; NRCS was invited to join in the celebration of LaDon's artwork on exhibit in the Choctaw Nation Tushka Homma Museum, during the 2008 festival. LaDon's artwork truly captured the theme for the 2007 American Indian Heritage Poster Contest, "We are all one family dedicated to protecting Mother Earth." The NRCS American Indian Heritage Poster illustrates how the conservation mission of NRCS is similar to the mission of tribal Nations who are also dedicated to preserving our land for future generations.

Choctaw Nation Tushka Homma Museum hosts NRCS and Choctaw artist



Elder Leland Debe

Story and pictures by Jane Skalisky *Nah gah chi wa nong Di bah ji mowin nan*

Far end of the Great Lake—Fond du Lac Reservation

Leland turns nutrition into a fine art

For Leland, gardening has become a passion and a life-saving pastime. Twenty years ago, after returning to the area from New Mexico, Leland had a heart attack and the next year discovered that he was diabetic. The first doctor he visited wanted to perform a risky operation on his arteries. Leland got a second opinion, which was to get moving. So he did.

“At that time, I couldn’t even walk half-way around the gym,” said Leland. “Gardening has given me an extra five to 10 years of life.” Leland and his wife, Norma, soon moved to a rural site on the Reservation and started their first garden. It wasn’t long before they became master gardeners and began coordinating the annual Gitigaan garden classes that have taken place every spring in the Cloquet Elder Nutrition Program meeting area for the past 15 years.

The Debe’s efforts have borne fruit. In 2008, Resource Management’s Sean and Adam Thompson tilled a record number of 200 gardens on the Reservation, up 50 from the previous year.

Leland picks heirloom beans.



At the USDA Conference, Leland shared his knowledge of heritage and heirloom seeds. Heirloom seeds are seeds from ancient plants that have been handed down through the generations. Research performed by the University of Minnesota has found that food from heirloom plants have exceptional nutritional value, according to Leland.

The replacement of locally indigenous breeds has reduced the gene pools of various wild breeds, resulting in the loss of genetic diversity. Since indigenous breeds are often better adapted to local extremes in climate and have immunity to local diseases, this represents an erosion of the gene pool.



Leland is his heirloom pumpkin patch.

Newer, genetically engineered varieties are a problem for local biodiversity, as some of these plants contain designer genes that would be unlikely to evolve in nature. These may pass into the wild population with unpredictable consequences and may be detrimental to the success of future breeding programs.

Leland and wife, Norma, have a 32-foot by 80-foot heirloom garden. They grow cucumbers, peas, beans, beets, tobacco, dill, corn, squash, pumpkins and tomatoes. He is especially proud of his tomatoes and told a story about giving his son a plant last year that produced what a neighbor mistook for a red pumpkin.

The Debe’s yard is filled with apple trees and plum trees; blueberry plants, onions and peppers grow alongside their front steps. The greatest investment required for a garden says Leland, is time. He spends two hours a day in his garden on average, but finds the pay-off worth it.

He also likes knowing that his food is safe to eat. “If you raise it, you know what’s in it,” he said.

Another benefit reaped is a full freezer and pantry. In 2005, Norma put up 42 quarts of corn, 30 quarts of tomatoes, 60 jars of salsa, 44 pints of green beans, and 20 pints of peas.

The Debe’s ethic is one of sharing, not only the produce from their garden and their seeds, but the knowledge they have gained. They would like to pass on what they have learned to the next generation by working with students from the Ojibwe School to create a garden on-site and establish a community garden on their land.

The 2008 AIANEA National Council

Millie Titla –President

David Wise - 1st Vice President

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