

RiverCity

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WORDS OF RECONCILIATION

Wagner Man Uses A Weekly Column To Bridge The Gap Between Cultures

BY LORETTA SORENSEN
P&D Correspondent

WAGNER — Vince Two Eagles of Wagner has a lot to say about reconciliation. The Wagner native has been penning weekly columns related to the topic for the *Wagner Post* for the past two years.

Two Eagles is now making plans to publish a collection of his columns so others can benefit from the information he has shared as part of the Horizons Project that Wagner residents have been working through for the past few years.

"Through the Horizons Project, communities in South Dakota are trying to address topics such as poverty and racism," Two Eagles said. "In our study circles in the Wagner community, we've been looking at different reasons that poverty exists. We've also addressed issues like crime, vandalism and graffiti. Our discussions also include the positive things we find in the community, such as friendly residents, the recreation opportunities at Wagner Lake and our good parks and schools."

In discussions about how to reduce racial tensions and stereotyping in their community, committee members developed the idea of providing a weekly column that educates the community about Native American culture.

"A lot of times, the local press doesn't include an Indian perspective in the news because they don't have a good understanding of our culture," Two Eagles said. "It's nothing deliberate; it just happens. The Indian residents here haven't taken any steps till now to help the community understand our cultural traditions and perspective on life. The column topics I've selected have been designed to improve that."

The topics Two Eagles elaborated on in his work have included contemporary issues the community deals with. He has also shared historic information with readers to help them grasp the roots of Indian customs and cultural guidelines.

"I invite the community to contact the newspaper with questions they have, and that's been very profitable," Two Eagles said. "One woman wanted to know about how Indians use cedar. That in itself was an entire column. I conducted some research about the use of cedar throughout Indian country."

Different Indian tribes have developed folklore about the use of cedar in their ceremonies and traditions. The wood was used to create musical instruments and also for planks used to build structures.

Other topics Two Eagles wrote about include the need for integrity and discipline on the part of Indian leaders.

"We sometimes have difficulty holding Indian leaders to high standards of behavior because they tend to think of us as prudes or finger pointers if we ask them to be sober and be an example of how our youth should conduct themselves," Two Eagles said. "The Indian community has a totally different concept of leadership than the white culture. We see ourselves as a circle, whereas the European nations had a pyramid concept. In European leadership models, once you're a leader you continue to hold a leadership position. In our culture, we step into a leadership role that requires the skills we possess. Once we've completed the necessary work for that role, we step back into the general circle and the next leaders step forward. It's two entirely different approaches."

Based on the circle concept, Indian cultures identified leaders in their community based on their day-to-day conduct. Those who were consistently respected in their community were often selected to fill leadership roles.

"My grandfather was an interpreter for the tribe, but when his services weren't needed any longer, he stepped back into that circle," Two Eagles said. "He didn't continue in a chief's role. When you maintain a high standard of behavior, the community can't say anything against you and you can lead your people with honor. In a democratic society it seems people are often chosen on a basis of popularity. We believe choosing people with integrity is more important."



PHOTO: LORETTA SORENSEN
Vince Two Eagles is planning to publish a collection of his columns addressing reconciliation issues the Wagner community has explored over the past two years. His writings have been published weekly in the *Wagner Post* as part of the Horizons Project the Wagner community is still working through.

Two Eagles' columns were also designed to educate Wagner's Indian population on how to approach community leaders with issues that concerned them. Through the columns and efforts of the Horizons Project, local Indian residents were able to communicate more clearly with local business. They have also learned ways to inform local officials about problems they encounter when seek-

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VINCE TWO EAGLES

ing services or conducting daily business.

"The Indian tradition has been based on diplomacy," Two Eagles said. "We were taught by our elders that all men should be regarded as brothers. Because of that, we treat each other equally. One of the things we've discovered through the Horizons Project and responses to the columns is that our Indian residents here don't always feel they're worthy of respect or receiving the best services. That leads to fear, which leads to other negative responses. Part of our effort here is to come to terms with

our history and move forward into the future."

Two Eagles, who possesses a degree in psychology, has served as a drug and alcohol youth counselor and youth organizer. Through that work he has developed a diplomatic perspective on life.

"Balance is important in a person's life," Two Eagles said. "You can't have balance in a community where people feel racially unequal or are shunned and ridiculed. Most communities have symptoms of some kind of imbalance. I have always admired the Chinese outlook on danger. They say danger means opportunity. If you have adversity in a community, it's an opportunity to change that atmosphere. In the end we are all brothers and sisters and what we do affects our children tomorrow."

"Our community is changing, whether we want it to or not," he added. "Our cultural traditions are changing, too, because our children don't want to adhere to the all the ways we learned. We're not out to change the world. We just want to see our children and grandchildren live happy lives, be at peace with themselves and others."

More information about Two Eagle's book will be forthcoming later this year.

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Every Thursday in April

Spin for your Lucky Charm to win up to \$250 in cash!

4 winners will receive \$1000

10 winners \$250
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12 winners \$100

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Drawing Times and Prizes: 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm
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Hot Seat drawings will be held every 1/2 hour from 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. for a chance to win \$25 in cash. (while playing slots, blackjack or poker)
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Fri. & Sat. April 30-May 1

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