

SDHOF ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

First, my induction into the South Dakota Hall of Fame provides me with an opportunity to highlight the important work Oglala Lakota College is involved with on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne Reservations.

To understand our College, you need to know the history of Indian education in this country. When Indian people were placed on reservations there was a mentality that we were not smart enough to be professional people. As a result of this mentality, Indian people were sent off to trade schools to obtain a trade rather than sending them off to colleges. The most famous of the trade schools was Carlyle Indian School where the founder of the school, Captain Pratt, stated that the role of this school was to Kill the Indian, to Save the Man. What these trade schools sought to do was to remove any semblance of Indianness from these students by forbidding them from speaking their language and practicing their culture. The net result would be an Indian who was more white than Indian.

My mother Elizabeth Prue was a witness to this practice of not encouraging Indian people to go to college. In 1941, she graduated from St. Francis Indian Mission school and was at the top of her class, but she was advised to go Haskell Indian School to be a secretary. My only regret is my mother who died last year is not here to see her son receive this recognition

The trade school policy lasted until the 1960s with only a handful of Indian people attending colleges. However, beginning in the mid-1960s, Indian students were encouraged to go to college. When I graduated from high school in 1965, I attended the University of South Dakota along with 20 other Indian students and only two of us obtained a degree from USD which was a 90% failure rate. Today, the pass rate of Indian students at South Dakota colleges is still very low.

When our elders saw these failure rates, they decided to create a college that would prepare our Indian people for the professional positions on the reservation such as teachers and nurses. OLC has done a great job in this regard. If you would have come to our reservation in the 1960s, there may have been one or two teachers who were Indian and one or two nurses who were Indian. Today, of the over 200 teachers on the reservation, 100 of them are now Indian and 86% of the Indian teachers are OLC graduates and of the 70 nursing positions, 80% are Indian and 80% of the Indian nurses are OLC graduates.

Recently, OLC was ranked number 1 among all colleges and universities in this country in producing Indian college graduates with its AA degrees in Office Technology, Carpentry, and Auto Mechanics; in the top 10, with its Bachelor's degree in Lakota Studies, Social Sciences, Social Work, Business, Information Technology; in the top 20, with its AA in Nursing and Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education; and 5th with its Master Degree in Lakota Leadership.

Prior to making some concluding remarks, I want to thank those who have helped me in my career. I want to recognize Don Bierle of Yankton, Newton Cummings, Gerald One Feather of Pine Ridge who were not only my mentors, but also my friends. Also, the students, staff, and

faculty whose successes have resulted in me being considered for the South Dakota Hall of Fame.

The most heartwarming thing that I have come across in my college career was when one of our OLC students remarked when presenting to our Board of Trustees that she had a major drinking problem and likely on the road to dying as result of her drinking. She said that the College saved her life when she was encouraged to enroll at our College. She now has sobriety, on the President's List with a high point grade average and on our student Senate. In three years, she will join many other Lakota people as a graduate of our College. The most important thing is our College does save lives. It is a beacon of hope for Lakota people wanting to change their lives and it is likely that our College is one of the most important things that has happened for our Lakota people on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River reservations.

We as Christians say "but before the grace of God go I, and what I think this means is that every human being has a responsibility to make sure everyone succeeds in this country. We have to invest in human beings and one of the greatest investments that this country has ever made was when Congress passed funding for the Tribal Colleges. However, tribal colleges are called the best underfunded miracles in this country.

Helping Indian students from the 2nd and 3rd poorest counties succeed is what our college is about. I am proud of our staff and faculty especially our faculty for setting the high standards for students and our students rising to meet those expectations. The net result is our students go on to have very successful careers.

My concluding statement is thank you South Dakota Hall of Fame for providing me with opportunity to talk about my beloved college.