



CHEYENNE RIVER YOUTH PROJECT® TEEN LEADERS TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON, D.C. FOR FIVE DAYS OF MEETINGS, ATTRACTIONS & FUN

EAGLE BUTTE, SD (June 4, 2012) – American writer and painter Henry Miller once noted, “One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.” On May 22-27, six “Power of Four” teen leaders from the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation learned this first-hand as they left their north-central South Dakota home and traveled to Washington, D.C. for five days of high-level meetings, cultural attractions and unadulterated fun in the heart of the nation’s capital.

For many of the young people, this trip meant a lot of firsts: first airplane flight, first trip east of the Mississippi, first escalator, first metro ride and first time hailing a cab. But as exciting and memorable as those firsts were, they paled in comparison to what Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) had in store for them, through the generous assistance of Washington, D.C.-based law firm Fredericks Peebles & Morgan.

“We planned this trip to do a couple of things,” explained Julie Garreau, CRYP’s executive director. “Yes, we wanted to show them the heart of American democracy and one of the country’s greatest cities. But we also wanted them to see how many native people are living and working there, either in government or for one of the many not-for-profit organizations, dedicated to making life better for everyone in Indian Country. We wanted them to recognize that they could be sitting in those very same seats.”



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Trip participants comprised “Power of Four” teen interns: Cecil Baker, Sierra Bobtail Bear, Meta Charger, Madison Gripne, Allen Meeter and Romie Rabbit; Garreau and chaperones Laure Lachaud, Alexandra Meador, Anthony Potter and Heather Steinberger; and Garreau’s young nephews Khalid Garreau and Naden Joaquin.

On Wednesday, May 23, the group toured the White House and U.S. Capitol building, and they met Jodi Gillette, an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who now is President Obama’s senior policy advisor for Native American Affairs. They also had an opportunity to sit in the hearing room for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and visit with Jade Danner, policy director, a native Hawaiian who was born on the Navajo reservation and grew up in the indigenous community at Barrow, Alaska.

Next, they visited with Sen. Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Sen. John Thune (R-SD) in their offices. Garreau said the visit to Sen. Johnson’s office was a particular thrill for the teens. “They got to thank him personally for our Cokata Wiconi Teen Center,” she explained. “We never would have been able to build it without his support, and the kids really wanted to let him know how important that center is in their lives. It was a special moment.”

On Thursday, May 24, the group visited the U.S. Department of the Interior, where they met Mike Black, director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and an enrolled member of South Dakota’s Oglala Sioux Tribe. They also were able to spend time with Donald “Del” Laverdure, acting assistant secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs and enrolled member of the Crow Tribe in Montana.

“The kids really connected with Del,” Garreau reflected. “He was very approachable, and he told them stories about his life growing up on the rez. He let them know that he understood their challenges and their experiences, and you could see the light in their eyes as they realized someone just like them could come to D.C. and make a real difference in Indian Country.”

After a hearty lunch at the city’s celebrated Ben’s Chili Bowl, the CRYP group took a private tour of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Not only did they see the new exhibition “A Song for the Horse Nation” and a special display dedicated to the Lakota people, their tour guide also was an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

“We were so grateful to have Mandy as our guide,” Garreau said. “It was neat for the kids to listen to her and ask questions, understanding that she shares their roots and knows so many of the same people. It was a little bit of home in the big city.

“We also overheard one of our girls, Meta Charger, comment to the others that ‘it’s so cool to be native,’” she added. “NMAI is a great way for our young people to celebrate their heritage, and it’s a wonderful thing to see them shining with pride.”

The teens had a chance to revisit the museum later that evening, as NMAI hosted a special reception for the new exhibition, “Native American Olympians.” The kids got a sneak peek at the new show, and they had the opportunity to meet famous Olympian Billy Mills, who grew up on the Pine Ridge reservation and went on to win the Gold Medal in the 10,000-meter race at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

“Sierra Bobtail Bear is a cross-country runner, and it was a highlight of the evening to see the look on her face as she had her photo taken with Billy and his medal,” Garreau said. “That was a moment she’ll remember all her life.”



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The group attended a special breakfast with Mills at NMAI the following morning, May 25, then attended a series of presentations at the Aspen Institute. Not only did they learn about the institute's Center for Native American Youth policy program, they met representatives from the White House Internship Program, the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, the National Congress for American Indians, the George Washington University Native Leadership Program and the Association for American Indian Affairs.

"We were so proud of our kids, because they really started to open up during these presentations," Garreau said. "They asked questions about how they can prepare for internships, how they can help their home communities right now and what it's like to live and work in a metropolis like Washington D.C."

"They also had a chance to discuss their biggest concerns, which include poverty, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, animal cruelty and not having enough to do when school's out for the summer," she continued. "They also talked about programs and facilities that help them address those issues — tutoring, basketball, using the Cokata Wiconi art studio and library. It was great to hear, because that's why we built our teen center in the first place." Garreau said she also was delighted to hear teens expressing their hopes to pursue their studies, to play college-level sports and to perhaps even obtain a coveted internship.

"Many of our kids fell in love with D.C., saying they couldn't wait to come back or even to live here someday," she commented. "They said they'd miss it when they went home."

After a pizza lunch at the Fredericks Peebles & Morgan office, the group visited the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, enjoyed a lively supper at the Hard Rock Cafe and toured the city on a double-decker, open-top bus. On their final day, May 26, they toured the International Spy Museum, the exhibition "The Art of Video Games" at the Smithsonian's American Art Museum and, finally, the celebrated Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.

On their final morning, the teens paid their respects to those who made the ultimate sacrifice at the Korean War Memorial and the Vietnam War Memorial.

"It was a jam-packed week, and I'm sure the kids are still processing everything they saw and learned," Garreau said. "They had so many experiences. They rode the tallest escalator in the Western Hemisphere, at the metro



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station in DuPont Circle. They cheered through their first-ever IMAX movie. They played Wii games and had hors d'oeuvres at an evening museum reception. They laughed and talked in the shade on the National Mall. They strolled Georgetown at night. And, most importantly, they visited with native people from all over the country who are making a difference, right now, right here. They recognize themselves in these people, and they see that it's possible for them to reach high, to dream big. That's priceless."

"We can't possibly thank everyone enough for making this trip happen for our young people," she concluded. "Everyone opened their doors, and their arms, to us. And they've opened our kids' eyes. There's no doubt they are seeing many things differently — and that new way of seeing can change lives forever."

To learn more about the Cheyenne River Youth Project and its programs, and for information about making donations and volunteering, call (605) 964-8200 or visit www.lakotayouth.org. And, to stay up to date on the latest CRYP news and events, follow the youth project on Facebook and LinkedIn.

The Cheyenne River Youth Project, founded in 1988, is a grassroots, not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing the youth of the Cheyenne River reservation with access to a vibrant and secure future through a wide variety of culturally sensitive and enduring programs, projects and facilities that ensure strong, self-sufficient families and communities.